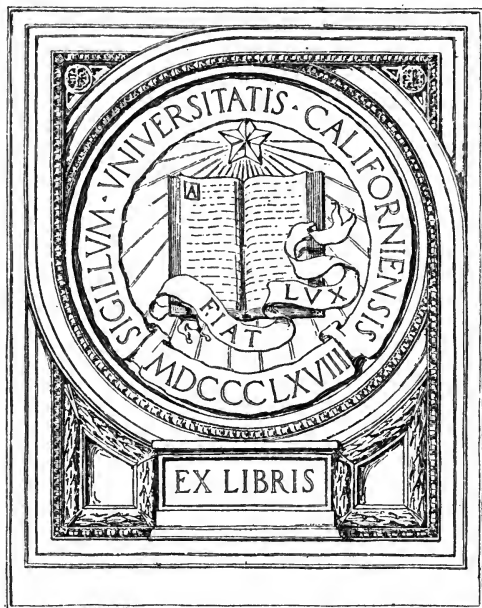


JUDITH
MARTIN SCHÜTZE

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JUDITH

A TRAGEDY IN FIVE ACTS

BY

MARTIN SCHÜTZE



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JUDITH

CHARACTERS

- OZIAS
- CHABRIS
- CHARMIS
- } *Chief Elders of Bethulia*
- EKRON
- ACHIOR, *deposed commander of the Ammonites*
- FIRST CITIZEN
- SECOND CITIZEN
- THIRD CITIZEN
- } *of Bethulia*
- An officer of guards, soldiers, and guards*
- Citizens of Bethulia, men, women, and children*
- JUDITH
- A widow*
- DINAH
- A group of Bethulian women, consisting of singers and dancers*
- HOLOFERNES, *commander-in-chief of the Assyrian army*
- BELTESHAZZAR, counselor to Nebuchadnezzar*
- BAGOAS, *aide to Holofernes*
- ARAMES, Chief of Staff, dismissed by Holofernes*
- PILESER, first Assyrian general*
- NEBO, second Assyrian general*
- ARPAD, first Mede general*
- PHARES, first Persian general*
- Second Persian general*
- KOZ, Assyrian petty officer*
- NOPHAH, another Assyrian petty officer*
- Third Assyrian petty officer*
- An orderly*
- Another orderly*
- A third orderly*
- Generals, petty officers, privates, of the Assyrian and allied forces*

The action takes place in Bethulia, a fortified hill town of Judea, and in the camp of Holofernes

ACT I



JUDITH

Act I

BETHULIA, one of a number of fortified hill towns guarding the defiles leading from the plains up into Judea.

A public square, on the top of the hill, commanding, beyond the fortified wall and some house roofs, a view of the surrounding country. At the back, left third, a chain of high hills in profile, crowned with fortified towns; the remaining two-thirds, a vast valley filled with camps of Holofernes' army.

Present: Ozias, Chabris, Charmis, and other Bethulian Elders, and a crowd of people.

Ozias is an impressive elderly man, firm and kind of aspect; Chabris, spare, sharp-featured, his gaze burning with religious fervor. Charmis, well-fed, with round jovial features and watchful keen eyes, has the tentative manner of a character formed under the sole guidance of public opinion. The people are divided into two main groups, the First group, conspicuously large, clamoring for immediate relief; the Second, led by Ekron, demanding resistance to the last extremity. Besides these compact groups, many individuals, men, women, and children, are seen displaying various degrees of suffering, despair, and fortitude.

GROUP I.

Water! Water!

FIRST CITIZEN OF GROUP I.

Our children are perishing.

SECOND CITIZEN OF GROUP I.

Our women and old men are falling upon the streets.

OTHERS.

We are dying of thirst! Water! Water!

CHABRIS.

The God of our Fathers will not desert His children.

FIRST CITIZEN.

Why does He not give us water?

SECOND CITIZEN.

Why does He not open the springs of the sky?

THIRD CITIZEN.

The strength has gone out of our young men; they can no longer defend us!

CHABRIS.

Hear me, my brothers!

FIRST CITIZEN.

This is a branch from yonder tree. The leaves rustle like oak leaves in the blasts of January.

SECOND CITIZEN.

Our tongues are withered as the leaves; they cleave to our throats——

CHABRIS.

Because the springs of faith are dried in your hearts!

SECOND CITIZEN.

This grass is from the pasture. It is sere to the roots; there is no juice in it.

THIRD CITIZEN.

Thus the strength of our flesh is withered away, and the channels of hope are dry——

CHABRIS.

Because levity has drained the wells of your spirit!

THIRD CITIZEN.

I dug down into a spring, to the bare rock. I found this dust as dry as the sand at our feet.

SECOND CITIZEN.

'Tis dry as the breasts of our women. What shall become of our babes?

CHABRIS

(taking of the dust, holding it in his palm).

Behold, I breathe upon this dust. 'Tis gone.
Thus will our foes be scattered by the Lord.

FIRST CITIZEN

(with gesture).

Look! The encamped host of our enemy.
His footmen are more than the dust of the
valleys——

SECOND CITIZEN.

And his horsemen, than the waves that thunder
upon the ocean shores.

EKRON.

Blasphemers! You speak against the power
of the Lord.

CHABRIS.

God led our Fathers from the ancient gods
Of their Chaldean ancestors to give them
The promised land of Canaan to inherit. . . .

EKRON.

While

They put their trust in Him! . . .

CHABRIS.

Could He not save us
From this new man-god of Assyria?

FIRST CITIZEN.

The Assyrians have multiplied in power
Above the nations, having conquered all.

CHABRIS.

The waters of the sea He cleft that He
Make dry the path before our Fathers' feet.
Can He not cleave high heaven to bring down
rain

On us, or bid the earth divide and swallow
The Assyrian host? He brought our Fathers
safe

Out of the desert, giving them to inhabit
The land by Him appointed. Forty years
Their faith was tried nor wanting proved.
And ye

Are faint in forty weeks?

FIRST CITIZEN.

Their wrath will burn
Us up; their lances will pass through our sides;
Their horsemen will lick up our mountains.

CHABRIS.

They

Glory in shield and spear and bow and sling,
But know not 'tis our Lord that breaks the
battle.

The multitudes of earth are as one man
To Him.

CITIZEN OF GROUP I.

He has forsaken us!

EKRON

(fanatically).

Take them!

'Tis death! They have blasphemed the Lord!
[*Aggressive movement of the fol-
lowers of EKRON.*

OZIAS.

Peace, brother!

CHABRIS.

God of our Fathers, heed not, I beseech Thee,
The faintness of their spirits!—While our
Fathers
Sinned not before the Lord our God they pros-
pered,

For He was with them. But when they departed
From the appointed way they were destroyed
In many battles very sore, and led
Into captivities in foreign lands,
Their cities broken and their temples cast
Upon the ground.

CITIZENS

(*to Elders*).

Deliver up the city!

FIRST CITIZEN.

You hear their will!

SECOND CITIZEN.

Although we be a spoil
Unto the heathen host and led away
Into captivity and bitter service,
Yet shall our souls live;

FIRST CITIZEN.

And we shall not see
Our babies perishing before our eyes.

SECOND CITIZEN.

Nor wives nor children withering in death!

EKRON

(to Elders).

Stop the blasphemers! Stay the tongue of
treason!

FIRST CITIZEN.

Our mountains will be drunken with our blood.

SECOND CITIZEN.

Our plains filled with our bodies, and our wives'
And children's!

CHABRIS.

God, choose not the Assyrian king
To be Thy sword of wrath for that Thy children
Have turned from Thee!

FIRST CITIZEN

(sneeringly).

Thou wouldst obey the Lord,
And yet strike down the very sword He lifts
Against thy godliness!

CHABRIS.

But Ashur's King
Has purposed to profane His sanctuary

And to defile the dwelling of His name.
The sword would rise against the hand that
wields it.

Will not His hand strike it upon the flat
And break it, an untempered tool? Have faith,
Your Fathers' faith, and He will lead you forth
That every tribe and nation know that He
Alone is God of heaven and earth.

FIRST CITIZEN

(to his followers).

We have
No helper, O, my friends! Our God has sold us
Into our enemies' hands, and those our rulers
Would slay us now with thirst.

EKRON.

Blasphemer! Take him!

(To his followers.)

We are few, but one in faith and single purpose,
They many, but their will's a broken sword,
Their purpose, scattered wrack upon the wind.
Their very mass compact with cowardice,
Each bracing what he'd broach to hide within,
Can we but pierce it—and, with faith, we can!—

Will spill the only heart that makes it stout.
Up, up, brothers! At them! Our Fathers'
faith!
Our Fathers' God!

[*A riot threatens.*

OZIAS.

The curse of God on him
That breaks the peace!

SECOND CITIZEN.

But who will speak for us,
The many, that the sum of Ashur's wrath
Are both to swell and pay?

CHARMIS.

Brothers, hear them!
'Tis their will we were chosen to enact.
As balanced tongue inclines in loyal bias
To the heavier scale, so our united will
Publish the bent of theirs. . . .

EKRON.

Thus speaks unfaith.
We will not hear him.

OZIAS.

Peace! Let all that bear
Authority among us speak, that we
Know each opinion ere we choose.

CHARMIS

(continuing).

It is

Their wish, tempered and tooled to keenest edge
Amid the lean flames of extremity,
That we deliver up the city now
To Holofernes, the supreme commander
Of the Assyrian armies.

GROUP I.

Aye, aye, aye!

Give up the city!

EKRON.

Not till you have slain
Each one of us, sworn to defend the gates
While arm can wield sword!

EKRON'S FOLLOWERS.

Aye, aye, to the last!

EKRON.

He's less God's enemy that openly
Batters his heathen pride upon those gates,
Than you that would betray God's chosen dwell-
ing.

We spare no enemy of God!

CHABRIS.

Brothers,

Is this the ancient spirit of our race?
Are these, huddled in weakness and unfaith,
The sons of Abraham that would have slain
His first-born to appease the Lord? Would you
Slay all our offspring by defying God
Rather than save them by obedience?
Because one of his women was dishonored
Our father Simeon arose and slew
His foe, master and servant, all his tribe;
And you would now deliver up your wives,
Daughters, and every woman of our race,
To the pollution of our sacred blood?

FIRST CITIZEN.

The Lord has dried the fountains of our
strength.

SECOND CITIZEN.

He has forsaken us.

FIRST CITIZEN.

Give up the city
Ere mad obstinacy has worn blood-sore
Our foeman's temper.

EKRON.

The sword alone can cleanse
Such wickedness!

*[A commotion at the back. Enter
rapidly two soldiers from back.]*

FIRST SOLDIER.

I would to the Chief Elder.

VOICES.

Ozias!

OZIAS.

Your message, pray!

FIRST SOLDIER.

The enemy
Sends Achior, leader of the Ammonites,

His allies, to the city. He is close
Upon our heels.

*[Enter ACHIOR, escorted by a body
of Bethulian guards.]*

OZIAS.

An Ammonitish chief
As herald to Bethulia?

CHABRIS.

They have felt
God's hand ere this!

OZIAS

(to ACHIOR).

I will hear you.

ACHIOR.

I come,

A suppliant, not herald: Achior,
By mighty Holofernes hither banished
To share your fate because in privy council
Alone of all his generals I dared
Speak truth of your God's power.

(to the people).

An Ammonite

A witness to our God who has revealed
Himself to you a thousand times, and you
Forswear Him!

OZIAS

(to ACHIOR).

Strange requital! Punishment
For speech that owns no bias to the occasion
Nor to some secret subtlety of wrong,
Ev'n though it rear the front of cruelty
Should have the heart of mercy.

ACHIOR.

Truth and love
That house the shadow of reproach to-day,
Will be to-morrow's outlaws.

OZIAS.

How should you,
An Ammonite, speak truth of Him you spurn?

ACHIOR.

Have we not felt His arm when He made
strong
Your battle?

OZIAS.

But what are we that you should sound
Our hearts?

ACHIOR.

Valor is to craft a labyrinth,
But to his like, an even path.

OZIAS.

Proceed!

ACHIOR.

Midst all the mighty nations lying south
And west of Caucasus down to the ocean
Your little band compact upon these hills,
The bulwark of Judea, like survivors
Of a great flood tip-toe on some high roofs
Clear barely to the eaves; your little nation
Alone has scorned to yield her hardy freedom
Into Nebuchadnezzar's tyrant keeping
For meek and prosperous dependency

And infamous corruption of your souls
Among a universe of slaves.

CHABRIS.

Hear, brothers,
And know the words the King said in his heart :
“ I will ascend to heaven, I will exalt
My throne above the stars of God.”

ACHIOR.

The King,
Disdaining first to credit the report,
Then laughing his sere laugh the blast of which
Has kingdoms made to shrivel; suddenly,
His anger roused, that fearful, moody ire
That crouches in the pupil of his mirth
As in a pit with gorgeous flowers decked,
Intent to spring and tear; bade Holofernes,
His chief commander, teach you, Asshur-wise,
To fear the King of Kings and God of Gods,
Lord of the Universe, Nebuchadnezzar.

CHABRIS.

And in his heart he said: “ I will ascend
Above the heights o’ the clouds, that I shall be
As the Most High.”

EKRON.

Yet shall we bring him down
Into the pit. The pit shall swallow him.

ACHIOR

(continuing).

Great Holofernes quickly bound your country
Within an iron chain of close-linked armies,
Locking, down to yon dim horizon's edge,
Each outlet gorge that runs 'twixt ranging hills
Into the plain. And farther still, if you
Could fly to that blue line of hills almost
Dislimning in a bath of golden haze
You'd tire your sight upon an iron line,
The counterpart of that; and thence again,
And yet again, until your vision flagged
On Jordan's mists. Bethulia alone,
This outpost crag, he needs to close his chain
As with a clasp.

CHABRIS.

Our battle is the Lord's.
He is our strength.

JUDITH

OZIAS

(to ACHIOR).

Less, pray, of Asshur's might.
Recount the occasion of your banishment
And his designs.

A SOLDIER

*(to CITIZENS who are trying to break through
the line of soldiers).*

Give way!

CITIZEN

(jostling).

What did he say,
In chains, all?

SOLDIERS.

Away!

ACHIOR

(resuming).

The hazards of attack
To weigh, he called a meeting of his chiefs.
Cowards in council e'er outbrave the bravest!
They voted as one man for prompt attack,

Each squinting at the other for a cause
Of fell backbite, by others' haste each hoping
To further his designs. At last I rose:
"Desist if the Bethulians are faithful
Unto their Lord," I said, "for He is mighty
Above the multitudes of earth. But if
They've sinned against Him He will break their
battle
And you shall wield the scourge of His revenge."

CHABRIS.

Listen, ye faint of heart, and heed the stranger
That knows the Lord!
[*Uneasy murmurs among the crowd.*]

ACHIOR.

They swarmed in hornet rage
—For servile ears spurn Truth unless it
please—,
Craving my death. But mighty Holofernes,
Sitting in easy quiet mid the din,
At last bade silence with a nod. Then, turning
To me, spoke, laughing that great-hearted laugh
In which the boy still frisking at his sports

Blends with the mighty arbiter of men,
Loving men more the more their candid wills
Compel the full exertion of his own:

“That you may prove the worth of your profession

I banish you among mine enemies
Whose God more than your King you trust.
You shall

Not see my face again until we meet
At the decision of your common fate.
Now, if your faith be as you say, rejoice
For I shall lie before you in the dust.
But——”

FIRST CITIZEN

(pushing against the soldiers).

In the dust?

SECOND CITIZEN.

Who?

SOLDIER.

You, unless you yield!

And you!

ACHIOR.

I needs must be your friend, my fate
Being linked with yours. Believe me now——

OZIAS.

My friend,
Such courteous pride and generous candor plead
Louder a soldier's cause than oath or witness.
Proceed.

ACHIOR.

He swore, who never pares his oath,
To slay you as one man and from the face
Of earth destroy your city for that you
Of all the mighty nations barred your hearts
To his will. (*Pause.*)

[*Complete silence.*]

CHARMIS

(*crying out*).

Shouts of despair man could endure,
Wailings of anguish bear, but such a silence
Breaks stoutest hearts! Aye, breathe, and
choke, and groan,
Aye, wedge a voiceless gasp through throats
tight-drawn;

Murmur in awe, let sudden madding shrieks
Rend this dumb spell of horror! Weep, and
show

This numbness still knows pain! Or howl, howl,
howl,

With joint unpalsied impulse of despair
Meeting in armless show of lusty strength
The doom you cannot break!

*[With one impulse, the people burst
into a howl of desperation.]*

FIRST CITIZEN.

The Lord has sold us
Into our enemies' hands!

SECOND CITIZEN.

We have no God!

THIRD CITIZEN.

We will have no God! Nebuchadnezzar shall
be
Our God!

FIRST CITIZEN.

Our blood is on your heads!

OTHERS.

Our lives!

We'll have our lives! . . .

[A hush begins at the back, spreading forward.]

OZIAS

(to Elders).

What solemn hush descends!

CHABRIS.

What hallowed presence is abroad! . . .

OZIAS.

'Tis she,

Judith, Manasse's widow, who, frustrate
Of private ministry, these three lean years
Has sought the presence of the Lord.

ACHIOR.

Behold,

The flame within her eyes! 'Tis less corporeal
Than blazing fervor of desire, yet burns
With more consuming power.

CHABRIS.

'Tis the divine
Immortal ardor of the soul, from the ashes
That springs of private needs.

OZIAS.

I read it, rather,
The potency of private needs transfigured
In utter faithfulness and service.

*[Enter JUDITH surrounded by the
people.]*

FIRST CITIZEN.

Save us,
Judith, we look to you for life!

JUDITH
(quietly).

Nay, brothers,
Upon those serried hills our brothers look
To us for theirs.

SECOND CITIZEN.

The Great King's General
Has sworn to slay us as one man.

JUDITH

(quietly).

Behold!

Deep in the keeping of those sacred hills
As priceless jewel on a woman's breast
Sits fair Jerusalem that you have sworn
To hold more dear than life. Your brothers'
souls
Hang on you, would you dash them to the
ground?

THIRD CITIZEN.

We've fought our brothers' battle, let them fight
Their own.

JUDITH.

But who shall fight the Lord's who gave
This land our Fathers' fathers to inhabit?

FIRST CITIZEN.

Where are the gods of nations? Asshur's
strength
Did break the bow of Him of Elam, shivered
The sword of Tyre!

JUDITH

(who has slowly approached).

I have heard the evil words
They speak to you, Ozias!

*[Pointing to ACHIOR.**But who is this?*

And why are citizens constrained by troops
In public meeting? How could friendly speech
Win to their hearts across a line of steel?

OZIAS.

They came as guard to Achior, banished hither
By Holofernes. Guards, leave!

*[Exeunt guards.**Achior's news*

You know?

JUDITH.

It flies on panic's wings.

OZIAS.

Take counsel

How we make staunch the faint of heart lest
they,
Abject to-day, yet more unnerved to-morrow,

Will shattered grovel ere the moon has changed
Her quarter.

JUDITH.

Counsel oft rides tardy nag:
His eye keeps even with the winged wrong,
While clutch his hands at nothing. Have you
spoken
Words of our ancient faith to them?

CHABRIS.

Alas,

They are deaf to faith!

EKRON.

They have blasphemed the Lord!

JUDITH.

Thy faith is as a heavenly bolt that rends
But wants the heavenly grace to unlock the
showers
Of zeal on opened hearts.

CHARMIS.

Stay them we cannot!

Then let us follow!

EKRON.

Hear the word of treason!
Thy faith is a pied paper butterfly,
The toy of any hand wafting the fan
Of vulgar buoyancy.

JUDITH

(absorbed).

God! when our Fathers
Were sore afflicted Thou didst ever send
Thy Chosen Ones to give them victory.
Thy children now are tried until their hearts
Have failed them. We beseech Thee, Lord,
appoint
A Great One who Thy token bears for all
To see, whose purpose draws with equal trace
Bitter resolve and ardor's ready urge,
Who by a vital kinship of his own
Nor lackeying nor tyrannizing shares
Each motion of the common heart, nor tarries
Till in the late assay of ashen thought
He finds the right fordone, but snatches it
Fresh from the first dawn-glow of im-
pulse. . . .

ACHIOR.

I know

One such; He's sworn to slay us. . . .

CHARMIS.

Look! A woman

Weeping. . . .

CHABRIS.

With guards. . . .

*[Enter in haste a woman, with two
guards and an officer of the
guards.]*

THE WOMAN

(sobbing).

They've murdered Raphaim,
My husband! . . .

JUDITH

(to guards).

Is this as she says?

FIRST GUARD.

Yes, but . . .

THE WOMAN

(interrupting, amid sobs and moans).

He went for water, for our boy was dying
Of thirst, having a fever. And they slew him.
My Raphaim!

FIRST GUARD.

When the enemy cut off
Our water's source we were set o'er the last
Small well, now but a lifeless pool. We have
Orders to give no more than half a measure
To any one a day.

THE WOMAN.

Our child was dying——

FIRST GUARD.

Our orders yielded not to death.

OZIAS

(sadly, aside to JUDITH).

Aye!

[JUDITH covers her face.]

JUDITH
THE WOMAN.

37

But
They slew him with their swords who had no
weapon.

OZIAS
(*to guards*).

You hear her charge.

FIRST GUARD.

We tried unarmed restraint
By every means, when suddenly he flew
At one o' the guards. Drawing his sword he
stabbed him,
Then struck at me with murderous intent.
I had to slay him.

OZIAS
(*to officer*).

Did it happen so?

OFFICER.

Yes.

OZIAS

(to some women among the bystanders).

Comfort her, she has suffered greatly, sisters.
Attend her home.

*[Exit WOMAN, sobbing, with
several women.]*

OZIAS

(to guards).

You did your duty.

JUDITH

(to officer).

Come close;

How long can our supply of water last?

OFFICER.

Five days . . .

OZIAS

(to Elders).

Brothers, let us consult.

[They withdraw toward the side.]

OFFICER

(continuing).

. . . at the utmost
The sixth dawn will not find enough to round
A drop of dew on a grass tip.

JUDITH

(taken aback).

Five days!

*[Approaching Elders, in a low
voice.]*

Brothers, the extreme is near. Let swift resolve
Close with it lest it spring when we are faint.

*[Suddenly, starting back, with pas-
sion.]*

Five days! You shall not do it! God will
destroy you!

OZIAS.

This news will out. Rumor in frenzy breaks
All prison of concerted secrecy,
Releasing panic. We can hold the city
But five days longer.

JUDITH.

Would you tempt the Lord,
Setting a term upon His power? You cannot
Fathom the simple heart of man by tests
And sounds. Faith only, unremitting faith,
Can know its depths. And you would tempt His
heart

That holds the hearts of all men, past and
present,

And of the ages yet unborn, as the ocean
The trembling stars, you dare attempt His heart
By five days term?

OZIAS

(with finality).

Nay, 'tis not we that set
The term, but last extremity.

[Raising his voice.

Brothers,

Go hence, each to his house and search your
hearts

In prayer that God defend us. We will hold
The city five days more.

CHABRIS.

Seek out all sin
And cast it from among you, find pollution
With fire to cleanse it, wickedness discover
That it be judged, and all idolatry
Destroy that God may know we have returned
Unto His ancient law.

EKRON

(to his followers).

Seek out God's foes!

OTHERS

(whispering).

Idolater, he says?

MORE VOICES

(whispering together).

Aye, aye! God's foes!

OZIAS.

What purpose melts these groups but now con-
tending
To noisy singleness?

JUDITH

MORE VOICES

(louder, together).

Idolater!

Where's he?

CHABRIS.

Behold the ancient ardor of the law
Once more aflame!

ACHIOR.

'Twill serve to make them slight
Their private ailments.

EKRON

(to mob).

Follow me!

MOB.

Aye!

Idolater!

[Exeunt EKRON and MOB.]

CHABRIS

*(to ACHIOR, pointing to JUDITH, who stands
in visionary absorption).*

The spirit of the Lord
Is on her!

OZIAS

(to ACHIOR).

Is the Assyrian army stanch
And unified?

ACHIOR.

'Tis trained and Holofernes
Can wield it as his sword, yet honeycombed
By intrigue and jealousy.

OZIAS.

Is he so great
Bold factions couch and jealous strife grows
tame
At his word?

ACHIOR.

Each would be at the other's throat.
Bodies of forced auxiliaries and humbled
And disaffected rulers are like curs
Of different breeds mewed up together. Give
me
A handful of stouthearted men, I'd drive them
Into the sea, except for him. There's none
But mighty Holofernes that could hold them

Buzzing, but harmless, as a skilful keeper
Of bees can maul and mould an angry swarm,
Smiling, with naked hands, like heated wax.

CHABRIS

*(pointing at JUDITH, in an awed voice, to
OZIAS).*

She's in God's presence. God speaks to His
children.

JUDITH

(in an attitude of prayer).

God of my father Simeon, Who gavest
A sword into his hands that he take vengeance
Of strangers who had loosed a virgin's girdle
Defiling her to her reproach, because
Thou hatest the pollution of Thy blood
And profanation of Thy daughters' wombs;
O God, who gav'st their rulers to be slain
With all their servants for their wickedness,
Dyeing their beds, that were ashamed for her
Who was defiled, with blood; who gav'st their
wives
And daughters to Thy children as a prey
For the great shame that had been wrought upon.

A virgin: God, O my God, hear me also
Who am a widow. Smite by the deceit
Upon my lips the servant with the prince
And the prince with the servant. Make my
guile

And sore disgrace my glory, and their wound
And stripe; my shame their anguish; my affliction,

My brothers' zeal and courage; my reproach,
Thy praise, Thou saviour of the weak! . . .

[A commotion at the back.]

ACHIOR.

What riot,
As 't were a masterless stray pack of hounds
Harrying a rabbit!

*[Enter DINAH running, pursued
by a mob led by EKRON.]*

OZIAS.

Hither, Dinah!

DINAH.

Save me! . . .

'Tis false!

THE MOB.

Idolater! Confess!

EKRON

(laying a rough hand on the woman).

She hid him,

God's enemy!

OZIAS.

Release her, friend!

ACHIOR

(to EKRON).

Thy voice

Is thick with more than love of law.

THE MOB.

The law!

The law!

OZIAS

(to EKRON).

Who is the man, and what his crime?

EKRON.

Pollution of the blood of Juda. He's
This woman's lover, an idolater,
A Babylonian.

DINAH.

We have lived in peace
Among you many years. 'Tis known to all
He's no Judean.

EKRON.

'Tis the law. The Lord
Hates the corruption of His blood. He gave
A sword into the hands of Simeon
To slay the stranger that defiled the womb
Of Juda's daughter. We forgot His law
And He scourged us with great affliction. Now
We have returned to Him lest all our race
Perish.

CHABRIS.

That is the law.

OZIAS.

Deliver him

Unto the law.

DINAH.

His wife? His children's mother?
I? . . . Judith, save us!

JUDITH.

Wouldst thou slay thy people
That one man live?

EKRON.

And he God's enemy!

DINAH.

The heart sees truer than the word.

JUDITH.

Is thy heart
So great that the uncleanness of thy blood
Should stand before His word though thine
affliction
Were the rejoicing of the Lord?

[DINAH rises.

ACHIOR

(to OZIAS).

Look! She is
I' the presence of a wondrous peace.

DINAH

(a quiet wonder coming into her face).

Did you
Who were a wife enter the inmost chamber

Of woman's love? Can you have dwelt, you
also,

Within love's sanctuary and yet withheld
So much of self as would have entertained
A shadow of a shadowed stain? You had
known

Defilement then, not from his sin, indeed,
But from a plague spot in your soul, fouling
Purest intent by black contagion. Love
Heals, hallowing them, all defects except
His own base insufficiency.

JUDITH.

Wouldst thou
Rear the frail pride of self-integrity
Upon the wreck of Juda's cause?

DINAH.

A cause
That like a vulture battens on the ruin
Of dearest virtue, sweetest impulse God
Has set into our hearts, is not His cause.
A thousand thousand lives of sordid needs
And base dependence do not balance one
That scorns to use his brother as a shield
For his default, to turn, a scattered waste,

Upon an obscure scapegoat multitude
The true darts of God's bidding.

JUDITH.

Nay, woman,
Thou art besotted with thy wilful passion,
Deeming the sickly tenderness of lust
A sacrament.

DINAH.

Shrined in man's constancy,
A woman's true love is a crystal orb
That charts the context of all heaven and earth,
Making the splendid things more bright,
exalting
And glorifying ill and ugliness
Till each shows forth the countenance of God.
Let force but wrench or treason trick it from
him,
It falls and shivers, all its glory gone,
And God has lost a jewel that ev'n He
Cannot restore.

EKRON.

Give him up!

JUDITH

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DINAH

(*quietly*).

A daughter of Juda
Does not betray her husband.

FIRST CITIZEN.

She shares his guilt!

SECOND CITIZEN.

She has no heart for her people!

FIRST CITIZEN.

See her pride!

ACHIOR

(*to OZIAS*).

We must shield her.

THE MOB.

Stone her! Stone her!

ACHIOR

(*to OZIAS*).

Halt them!

EKRON

(in a formal tone of voice, to OZIAS).

She gave unto the enemy of God

Her body for defilement. . . .

JUDITH

(with a scream).

Nay! . . . Stay them! . . .

OZIAS.

What fearful apparition, daughter. . . .

JUDITH.

God!

I cannot do it. . . . I read Thy will with
me. . . .

I hear Thy word. . . . I . . . will. . . .
Ah!

*[She utters a piercing cry and falls
to the ground as if struck; the
people gather round her.]*

OZIAS.

By sudden bolt of heaven!

CHABRIS.

The hand of God!

EKRON.

A sign!

SOME PEOPLE.

The Lord has spoken.

OTHERS.

Mercy on us!

OTHERS.

What is His meaning?

ACHIOR

(whispering to DINAH).

Woman! Fly! . . . quickly!

The wall is near.

DINAH.

Is this Thy token, God?

[DINAH *starts running.*]

EKRON.

The woman! Gone! Pursue her!

JUDITH

THE MOB

(*starting in pursuit*).

Stone her! Stone her!

ACHIOR

(*colliding, ostensibly by accident, with the leaders*).

Friends, follow me! I saw her, but now.

EKRON.

Give way!

FIRST CITIZEN.

Your wit is slower than our feet.

SECOND CITIZEN.

Yield, lest

Our feet pass o'er your wit.

[ACHIOR *is knocked down*.

FIRST CITIZEN.

You're closer there

To the scent.

[*Exeunt* MOB, *following* DINAH.

ACHIOR

(rising; looking after them).

She's reached the wall! Up! . . .

Her hand slips.

Ah!

*[A shout, followed by a prolonged
roar.]*

Horrible! Is this your sacred law,
And these His servants? Mighty Holofernes
Would flout all kings and gods of heaven and
earth

Sooner than sate a mob's maw with a sop
Steeped in their lust of hate as in a broth
Black with corruption.

CHABRIS.

Absolute and final
Our laws, sprung from the fountain of God's
word,
Suffer no change, however foul the vessels
That hold His substance.

OZIAS.

You may yet see them
Courting a penalty of steadfast faith

Tenfold hers that defied her God. . . .

(To JUDITH, *who shows signs of returning consciousness.*)

Daughter! . . .

JUDITH

(*faintly*).

Where is she?

OZIAS.

The law is fulfilled.

JUDITH.

God, O, my God!

I read Thy sign. . . . I will accomplish
it. . . .

Thy cup is bitterer than ten-fold bitterness
Of felon's death; yet will I drain it. God,
O, my God, Thou Upholder of the weak,
Strengthen Thou me whom Thou hast chosen!

[*She rises.*

OZIAS.

God

Has sent to thee His sign. Wilt thou declare it?

JUDITH.

To-morrow at the first watch I shall go
Forth from the main gate (*pointing back*) to
the Assyrian camp.

You and the Elders, pray, stand at the gate
That when I turn to look I shall not want
The succor of your gaze.

OZIAS.

What is in thy heart
I know not, daughter. But I say to thee:
Into the valley of despair descending
Thou, our last morning sun of hope, shalt trail
A host of golden clouds, our prayers.

JUDITH.

Thus stand,
Gazing while I go down until all glimpse
Of me is lost among the Assyrian tents.
But this you shall not do: you shall not ask
A question, but with prayer and the influence
Of constant faith lift up my heart.

OZIAS.

No question
Shall be unleashed on thee.

JUDITH.

This word ye shall send
To every mountain town: "Within five days
Our God shall visit us!"—But you, my
brothers,
Each dawn upon the place where yonder camp
Shall swallow me, keep watch. You shall be-
hold
A fire, a gaunt straight tongue of flame ascend-
ing
As 't sought the shortest way to heaven. Forth-
with
With ready brand awake a signal fire
For all the hills, nor tarry till you see
Their answering flames, but on our enemy
Break forth, for God has given us victory.

OZIAS.

So be it.

JUDITH.

The word shall fly from hill to hill,
A torch count'ring the western flight of dawn
That they in far Jerusalem that guard

The Tabernacle of the Lord shall know
And stand rejoicing ere the enemy's brow
Has felt your swords. All Juda shall arise
And from each gorge shall sally forth her men
Upon the uncoiled Assyrian dragon's sides,
Smiting at once through every loosened joint.

*[She pauses in an attitude of
prophetic rapture.]*

CHABRIS

(awed).

Her spirit dwells with the Lord!

JUDITH.

God! O, my God!

Thy power is coming. In the hills of Juda,
As flood from heaven locked in a thousand gates,
Thy strength is gathered. But Thy wrath hath
spoken:

“Go forth!” From every guttered hill it
comes

Roaring, a smother of destruction, rage,
And triumph; headlong spring of ripe revenge;
Tumultuous assault on eddying fear,
Light-crested legions trampling down a huddle

Of howling, panic-stricken wretches. . . .
God,
Thy will be done! . . .

[She stands transfigured.]

OZIAS

(praying).

Thou, that hast given the sword
Of Thy revenge into Thy daughter's hand,
Bend now Thine ear to this, my prayer, which is
The prayer of all Thy people. God of our
Fathers,

Go Thou before her footsteps lest she stumble.
Let her hand rest in Thine to gather strength
From certain knowledge of Thy presence; make
The words of Thy will sound within her heart
That in her hour of weakness she hear Thee.

(In an altered voice, to JUDITH.)

Go, daughter, upon thy way. All Juda looks
To thee.

JUDITH.

God of our Fathers, go Thou before me!

[Exit JUDITH, slowly.]

(CURTAIN)

ACT II



Act II

*A*N open place in front of Holofernes' tent which is seen in profile extending over the entire right. A canopy of rich stuffs over the first of the two doors of the tent.

The plain beyond is covered with the tents of the Assyrian army. At the back, a front view of the Judean hills, the highest and nearest one of which, a little to the left of the center, is Bethulia. Each hill is crowned with a fortified town. Deep gorges lead up into the hill country.

[The morning following Act I.

Present: KOZ and NOPHAH, two Assyrian petty officers, and others.

NOPHAH.

'Authority! I say. Authority at any price!

KOZ.

Good! Let's auction off authority. Where is it?

NOPHAH.

Discipline and order! by the fiery breath of Baal, or the whole army will walk away like an uncovered cheese!

Koz.

Behold now, Nophah, the great impersonator! He will appear as Discipline that you could not tell him from a bailiff; next, as Order, that you wouldn't know him from a mouse; and finally, as Authority, that you would swear you saw a kite thrashing about in the strong wind.

[*Laughter.*

NOPHAH

(*roaring*).

By the blazing orb of Baal! If I were . . .

Koz.

Holofernes . . .

NOPHAH.

I'd keep the army trained on the softer tribes of the plains. . . .

KOZ.

Make fighters by leading a charge on sheep!

NOPHAH.

I'd flay a few of them to bring those hill men
to their senses.

KOZ.

Aye, skin a rabbit to scare a wolf!

NOPHAH.

And you'd starve a wolf to make him gentle.
We've been sitting before his lair these forty
weeks waiting for the wolf to invite us in.

KOZ.

We have gained time to improve our girths!
[*Laughter.*]

NOPHAH.

A vain tongue in an empty head! Ha!
ha! . . .

KOZ.

Maketh a greater roar than an empty belly!
[*Laughter.*]

Look! the scholars of your discipline!

[Enter soldiers of different nationalities, carrying rugs and national insignia; wrangling.]

PERSIAN SOLDIER.

Persians have the flank.

MEDAN SOLDIER.

Together with the Medes.

ASSYRIAN SOLDIER.

Assyrians at the head! Away there!

[All three trying to lay their rugs at the head of a line facing the tent.]

KOZ.

I move we empower Nophah to enforce discipline.

PETTY OFFICERS.

Aye! aye!

KOZ.

Unanimously resolved! Nophah, emergency is the final judge of men.

NOPHAH.

I thank you, comrades!

[Starting off toward soldiers, clearing his throat ostentatiously, then roaring.]

Quiet there! Quiet! By the burning tresses of Baal, I'll have you flayed in strips and braided together; then you'll keep peace. Assyrians, at the head! The Great King's new counselor would think jaundice had got Baal if his eyes fell on those yellow Persians first. Persians and Medes to the flank. . . . Well?

[Assyrian, Persian, and Median soldiers wrangling for the place at the end.]

ASSYRIAN.

This is the head!

PERSIANS AND MEDES.

This is the flank!

JUDITH

ASSYRIAN.

You go back! That's what we are familiar with, your back!

PERSIAN.

I'll put a better point on your tongue.

[Draws, soldiers interfere.]

NOPHAH.

Quiet, there, or I'll write instructions on your backs with this (*drawing*), and I'll draw the ink from your black hides. I will, by the fiery blood of Baal!

SOLDIER

(aside).

We'll have the color of yours first!

[Angry grumblings among the soldiers.]

KOZ

(to the other petty officers).

Comrades, I can tell by the hum when bees are going to swarm. Each to his men!

[Petty officers mingle with the soldiers.]

NOPHAH.

Knowing how to command, that is the secret of power! Hem! hem!

[Strutting apart.]

Koz

(to soldiers, caricaturing NOPHAH, with gestures).

He has heard Holofernes hem and takes his hem for the point of his trenchancy. He has seen him spit, and now he is charged like a geyser, (*spits*) for sagacity.

[Laughter among the soldiers.]

NOPHAH

(looking back, spitting, nodding his head sagely and winking at Koz).

Stern ruler makes merry realm!

Koz.

He has seen a great general nod and has been a-noddle ever since, for profundity. (*In an ordinary tone of voice, to Assyrians.*) You put your rugs here! . . . Yes. . . . (*Again indicating NOPHAH.*) He has quaked at a great

man's lifted eye-brow, hence he works his scalp, for dominion.

[*Laughter among the soldiers.*]

NOPHAH.

Quiet now! Look sharp there! Sharp, I say!

[*Works his scalp.*]

KOZ.

He has grown hot and cold under his master's gaze, hence he bulges his eye-balls, for puissance. . . . (*Indicating some of the allied soldiers, quietly.*) You; here! . . . He has seen him thoughtful and sets a loose jaw as a catch-all for silliness. . . . (*To other allies.*) This is your place.

NOPHAH

(*pleased*).

There now! Willing mule finds willing master.

KOZ.

Aye. He'll carry a lout a-top of his load.

[*Laughter.*]

Koz.

He has gorged upon the abundance of Holofernes' majesty to stuff the front of his importance. (*To others.*) Yours, here!

THIRD PETTY OFFICER

(*indicating NOPHAH.*)

Look at him swelling!

[*Boisterous laughter.*]

NOPHAH.

Quiet! Or I will . . . (*realizing the situation*). What? . . . (*To Koz.*) You? . . . You? . . .

[*Chokes.*]

Koz.

Holofernes' voice has made his terror deaf to the threat of battle: hear him roaring for mastery!

NOPHAH.

You shall answer for that! Mutiny! Conspiracy! Treason! I will to the chief! I will. . . . I will. . . .

[*Exit NOPHAH.*]

KOZ.

I thought I heard a turkey-cock gobbling.

[*Laughter.*

(*To Persians and Medes.*)

This is your end. . . . Hark! . . .

[*Distant gobbling. Renewed laughter.*

Boys, quick now! I see the Persian and Mede generals approaching. That will do.

[*Petty Officers and soldiers withdraw.*

[*Enter Persian and Mede Officers.*

FIRST MEDE (ARPAD).

A public council!

FIRST PERSIAN (PHARES)

(*ironically*).

In matters most domestic!

FIRST MEDE.

The King's new counselor . . . domestic?

FIRST PERSIAN.

Aye.

The King sends a new hen to sit on this Bethulian egg that spoils unquickened.

FIRST MEDE.

True.

FIRST PERSIAN.

We are called to hear a sample of her clucking.
Some say, though, 'tis a different sort of fowl.

FIRST MEDE.

Each man within this army has two hearts,
Each heart two tongues! What ear could join
again
Such multifarious speech doubly dismembered!
What say they?

FIRST PERSIAN.

Call him vampire.

FIRST MEDE.

What?

FIRST PERSIAN.

A slayer
That dupes his victim's sense his blood to drain.

FIRST MEDE.

The Assyrians!

[Enter Assyrian generals.]

JUDITH

FIRST PERSIAN

(in a sneering tone).

Good morning, comrades!

PILESER

(first Assyrian, haughtily).

Allies,

Good morning.

*[Assyrians move back, talking
gloomily together.]*

FIRST MEDE

(to PERSIAN).

Fear o'erglooms the beetling scowl
Of surly tyranny——

FIRST PERSIAN.

That seconded

Too loudly the old hen that's to lose her comb
To-day for cackling till the Great King's sleep
She broke.

FIRST MEDE.

Think you that Arames will be
A silent scapegoat?

FIRST PERSIAN.

Friend, the less it wags,
The more a scapegoat's tongue is eloquent. . . .
Look where they come in willing show, their
wits

Dragging in dubious leash their straining hearts
That but for strangling would this brazen dome
Of day with howling shiver.

*[Enter leaders of the allied forces
of Sidon and Tyre.]*

FIRST MEDE.

Tyre and Sidon,
Whose walls at sound of Holofernes' name
Fell crumbling.

[Enter Damascans.]

Proud Damascus! Lightning winged,
Fire-taloned, Holofernes' wrath swooped down
On her ripe fields and flocks. Of Syrian cities
The last, she tottered, wilted, shriveling passed
As on a burning plain mid weaker blades
A sturdier stalk.

*[Damascans, following the men of
Tyre and Sidon, pass on to the
Assyrians, bowing obsequiously.]*

FIRST PERSIAN.

They shoulder 't bravely!

FIRST MEDE

(smiling).

Burdens

Cast by rash shoulders fall upon the belly!

[Enter Mesopotamians.]

FIRST PERSIAN.

Mesopotamia!

FIRST MEDE.

These are but the scum
Assyrian thrift skimmed from the tide of blood
Sprung from the true sons of Twin-River land.

[Mesopotamians, bowing, join Assyrians.]

FIRST PERSIAN.

She did not teach those backs!

[Enter Elymaeans, bowing obsequiously, as the others.]

Lower! Yet lower!
From stainless heights the pride of Elam melts

Down to the mire of lowermost estate
Where squats security!

[Enter leader of Ammonites, followed by the remaining auxiliary commanders.]

FIRST MEDE.

Brave Achior,
Lone boar at bay amid these yelping curs,
Look at the whimpering pup beneath thy
pelt! . . .

Ah, cursed shame, a Mede, a Persian, cowed
Where Ammonite found voice!

FIRST PERSIAN.

Amen! Meseems
The first egg 's pipped. Let the Great King's
new hen
But sit awhile, and there will be a brood
Of chicks with swords for claws, arrows for
down,
Tearing a covetous churl with beaks of steel.

PILESER.

Allies, pray, to your places!

FIRST PERSIAN

(to MEDE, *without moving*).

See them scuttle.

PILESER

(*approaching* PERSIAN, *arrogantly*).

Each to his place!

FIRST PERSIAN

(*casually, looking past* PILESER, *to* FIRST MEDE).

A stifling morn!

PILESER

(*with malice*).

He pants

As if with panic spent, like the King's foes,
Their fear-unlidded eyes aglitter.

FIRST MEDE

(*aside*).

Guard

Thy freedom, heaven! Assyrian gaze has
clutched thee!

FIRST PERSIAN

(to PILESER).

Odd, Asshur's son in skyward venture! Did
you

Find title in the Chaldee's land also
To his bright empire of the air?

PILESER.

Perhaps.

I see among some lesser constellations
Signs of abrupt decline and full eclipse.

FIRST MEDE

(ironically).

A wise man he that steals from his foundation
To add to his steeple!

PILESER.

No more wise than he
That bites the hand that feeds him!

FIRST PERSIAN

(drawing).

I have that here
Bites cleaner than thy tongue.

PILESER

(drawing).

Traitor, I'll find

The secret of thy heart!

*[They fall to fighting; confusion.**[Enter HOLOFERNES, followed by
BAGOAS.*

BAGOAS

(calling).

The lord of our lives,

Great Holofernes!

HOLOFERNES.

Sheathe swords! To your places!

The very threshold of your chiefest care,

The central seat of joint authority,

You have bruised with mad dissension's
treasoned blows.The sword has two-fold edge; once drawn, ex-
cept

The public foe it seek, on secure friend

It takes backhand requital! Yet this division

Being but the working downward of a split

That starting from the very top would cleave,

As of a riven tree, the inmost fiber
And intermeshed coherence of this body
And commonwealth of war: I will dismiss
To-day's offense which certain death invites
Hereafter. You will witness presently
The mending of the matter in its cause
And topmost outbreak.

(*To BAGOAS.*)

Bring in Arames,
Late Chief of Staff.

BAGOAS.

At once.

[*Exit BAGOAS.*]

HOLOFERNES.

That done, you will greet
The Great King's Counselor, Belteshazzar,
charged
With special messages.

[*Re-enter BAGOAS, with ARAMES,
swordless, with a guard of
soldiers.*]

HOLOFERNES

(to ARAMES).

Behold your peers,
Proved in the fellowship of manly tasks
And trials mutual that search men's kidneys,
Laying them bare for obvious augury
Of every secret motion: Arames,
Did you, breaking the seal of loyalty
To me, a surreptitious full account
Of every grievance, every muttered wrong,
Each tortured proof and rumor of default,
The fevered yield of temper and delay,
Divert past my amending?

[ARAMES *stands silent.*

Speak! did you
Eye ear and memory to one unnamed
Proffer to my reproach?

ARAMES.

I had to choose
Between his wrath . . .

HOLOFERNES.

And treason against me!

ARAMES.

The Great King's Counselor constrained
me . . .

HOLOFERNES.

Stay!

Wouldst thou one treason by a worse amend?

ARAMES.

Pray, let my close array of services
And years of faithfulness plead for me now.

HOLOFERNES.

A buffet at a rash and forward trust
Though 't bruise, yet, chastening, tempers and
confirms.

But a foul blow at constant Faith, secure
Amid the bulwarks that the loyal years
Have reared with wary hands, calls sleepless
Hate

To fell revenge.

ARAMES.

Thou Great One, let thy mercy
That shone this hour on these that did offense
Against thee, smile on me also.

HOLOFERNES.

Has your mind
Grown so adept in the base levelings
And sly subversive casuistry of treason
That you would claim the consortship and shelter
Of zeal's impatience and a flash of temper
Whose edge outcleaves discernment?

(To soldiers guarding ARAMES.)

Strip a traitor
Of every sign of martial fellowship.

ARAMES.

My master! Let me be your slave, your dog,
And lick up crumbs you spurn that I may see
Your countenance!

HOLOFERNES.

Away, and let my eyes
See you no more!

ARAMES.

Slay me that my last glance
May take your impress and my soul bear 't hence,
A badge of honor among the Spirits of Light.
But do not shut the gates of darkness blacker
Than death on me while this my House of Life
Stands crumbling in dishonored ruin.

HOLOFERNES.

Hence!

[*Exit* ARAMES.

(To BAGOAS.)

Attend the Great King's Counselor hither.

BAGOAS.

Aye.

[*Exit* BAGOAS.

HOLOFERNES

(to generals).

A traitor shall be shunned of every man,
Nor even he that bought his treason, may
Acknowledge him. Thus let him stray, accursed,
Amid the sands of desolation till
The fell division in his soul shall cleave
Through all his being, that, a blasted tree,
Bleaching he lie upon a burning waste.

[*Enter* BELTESHAZZAR *with guard*
of honor, attended by BAGOAS.

BAGOAS.

The Great King's Counselor, Belteshazzar!

HOLOFERNES.

Generals,

Hail the Great King's ambassador!

GENERALS.

Hail! Hail!

Belteshazzar, hail!

BELTESHAZZAR

(to HOLOFERNES).

The King of Kings, the Lord
And Keeper of the Universe, sends greeting.

HOLOFERNES.

What breath of dawn unto the ready lark
The Great King's grace is to my spirit.

BELTESHAZZAR.

He charges,
In token of his favor, me, his counselor,
With special messages to Holofernes,
His faithful servant.

HOLOFERNES

(to generals).

Generals, pray, withdraw
A brief space!

*[Generals withdraw.]**(To BELTESHAZZAR.)*

Faithful! As his very hand
To his will; nor less than his great Counselor,

ORDERLY

(to HOLOFERNES).

The outposts took a woman from Bethulia
Who prays to be admitted to your presence
In matters of the utmost moment.

HOLOFERNES.

A woman?

BELTESHAZZAR.

A rustic that would beg a crust, I fancy.

ORDERLY.

You'd take her for a queen to see her move.
Where she appears there is a sudden stir
Among the multitude as patter of rain
In April, then a hush complete, all eyes
Intent on her as bees on bed of clover.
As a new star amid the ranged heavens
She moves among the marveling ranks of men.

BELTESHAZZAR.

A harlot in her finery has tricked
Your eyes, drought-fevered, friend.

HOLOFERNES.

A harlot, think you?

ORDERLY.

Her eyes have never looked on the heavy flames
Of sin, nor those lips drunk of gross desire.

HOLOFERNES.

I'll see her.

[Exit orderly.]

BELTESHAZZAR.

With the Great King's foes you parley?

HOLOFERNES.

Pray share this odd diversion! Bagoas!

BAGOAS.

Aye.

HOLOFERNES.

Recall the generals!

[Exit BAGOAS; re-enter with generals.]

BELTESHAZZAR.

Can straying harlots have the ears of him
On whom the fate of empire waits?

HOLOFERNES

(starting with surprise).

Ah, look!

Can rustics teach their women such a stride?
There's passion in that stride, a royal passion,
That could reshape a world. Belteshazzar,
Behold one of your petty rustics!

BELTESHAZZAR.

Hm!

A quality there is in wantonness,
A showy double of princely gallantry,
That steals the latter's pomp till slow endurance
Searches her proper mettle.

HOLOFERNES.

Ah! such women
Lock empires in their hearts, and fates of king-
doms
Forge in their gaze!

BELTESHAZZAR

(dryly, to himself).

Would that thy sword were hot
As thy sense!

HOLOFERNES.

She, a harlot!

BELTESHAZZAR.

By all signs, no maid.

HOLOFERNES.

Nay, more than maid! She bears the touch of
ripeness,
Fulfilment's cool content, that constant wedlock
Lays on the brows of women. From her eyes
A veiless candor gazes and a clear
Simplicity untutored in reserves,
Save resolute reserves of knowledge.

*[Enter JUDITH, richly dressed, with
MIRIAM, her maid, followed by
a crowd of officers and soldiers,
who are kept at a distance by
guards. MIRIAM carries a bag
of provisions.]*

JUDITH.

*(stopping with a start; pause, both she and
HOLOFERNES standing at gaze; then, to
herself.)*

Are such

God's foes?

MIRIAM.

Daughter, pause not your eye to feed
On His foe!

HOLOFERNES.

Approach! What wouldst thou?

JUDITH

(at his feet).

Holofernes,

Wisest in council, mightiest in war,
Most gracious among men, hear me, a woman,
An exile from my people for that I
In visions of the night saw on occasion
By which the Lord of Heaven appointed thee
His instrument to scourge His children.

HOLOFERNES.

Rise!

What must the women be that they hold fast
If thee they cast away!

BELTESHAZZAR

*(as JUDITH rises, constantly facing HOLO-
FERNES, to FIRST ASSYRIAN).*

'Tis but her tongue
Says "instrument," her gaze says "master"!

JUDITH.

Thou, Chosen of God, pray, bow thine ear to me
That I may speak the thing the Lord has called
Thee to accomplish.

BELTESHAZZAR.

In the Great King's name! . . .

[Stir among generals.]

Pray, do not heed the tongue of blasphemy.
Nebuchadnezzar, King of Kings, alone
Is Lord of all the Universe. There is
No will but his.

HOLOFERNES.

The Great King would not have
His general spurn a power whence he might
wrest
Rich furtherance of his designs.

BELTESHAZZAR.

I have heard
The tale of your o'ergenerous leniency
Toward Achior.

HOLOFERNES.

How know you of him?

BELTESHAZZAR.

I heard . . .

Tales.

HOLOFERNES.

Hm! Proceed!

BELTESHAZZAR.

I fear this woman comes,
Bethulia's exchange for him, deftly
To tend corruption's seeds sown by a traitor
In guise of friend's concern.

HOLOFERNES

(to JUDITH).

Speak unafraid
If you tell truth. A brave man would not spurn
An honest foe that chose him champion.

JUDITH.

Great Holofernes, if death be my portion
Yet of the Lord I must speak Truth that you
Knowing His power believe in me. The Lord
Is greater than all heaven and earth. His
wrath

Is as a sword of fire to them that rise
Against Him; all creation will He turn
Into His weapon against them.

BELTESHAZZAR.

Cunningly
She sets the mask of truth on bold defiance!
Making of Achior's defense a shield,
A sword, of o'ersecure forbearance, behold
Her striking at our joined trust.
[*Grumbings among generals.*]

FIRST PERSIAN

(*aside to MEDE, indicating BELTESHAZZAR and
generals*).

Behold!
His sweeping glances whip them to his will
In surging, charmed obedience.

HOLOFERNES

(*to JUDITH*).

Proceed!

JUDITH.

The earth's foundations melt away before Him
As snowflakes on the lip, the pillars of heaven

As mists before a breeze. The multitudes
Of earth are as one man to Him, and man
Is but a breath blown on a mountain. Who
Can stand against Him?

BELTESHAZZAR

(to generals, calling).

Hear the blasphemer!

GENERALS.

Slay her,
Slay the blasphemer of the King of Kings!

HOLOFERNES

*(taking her by the shoulders, gazing at her,
then).*

Woman, turn to them that would slay you for it
The front of faith that has slain fear.

*[Turns her that she faces front;
murmur dies down.*

BELTESHAZZAR.

Is faith
So pale?

HOLOFERNES.

The flame that most illumines is white.

FIRST MEDE.

(to FIRST PERSIAN).

Her gaze flaunts not the threat of strife and
daring

But humbly of some potency divine
Accepts the selfless ministry.

FIRST PERSIAN

(to FIRST MEDE).

Thus quick
With force that shatters strongest will!

BELTESHAZZAR.

A faith

That in fanatic flame consumes all fear
Sticks not at honor, desperate craft that bars.
For honor 's but thy fear of thine own soul.

HOLOFERNES.

Would she not serve the King? Is not her heart
True and courageous though her tongue err?

Woman,
Finish that we may judge rightly.

JUDITH.

The Lord

My God has sworn to overthrow my brethren
For they stood up against His sacred laws,

Decreeing in the extremity of famine
 And drought to desecrate the offerings
 Of bread and wine at His altars. He will send
 me

A vision in the night that I alone
 May know the time has come.

(Turning to HOLOFERNES.)

And you He chose,
 The sword of His wrath!

BELTESHAZZAR.

The Great King's sword that bears
 He does not look on other arms!

HOLOFERNES

(absorbed, looking at JUDITH.)

What must be
 The men that have such wives and mothers!
 Would
 That I could spare them for the King!

(To JUDITH.)

Woman,
 If you had come with practised lift of eyes
 I should have said: "Your lust is in your eyelids,
 Harlot," and given you to the camp for game.
 Or had you come with prayers for your people

I should have said: "They shall not fall like
men

By swords of soldiers, but like whining dogs
Be flogged to craven's death for that they let
Their women strive for them!" Or, had you
come,

A traitor to your people for your life,
I should have given you to the priests of Baal
For tortured sacrifice. But you have spoken
Bold in the face of death and I have seen
Your soul stripped of the base obliquities
The shuffling, faithless cowardice of men
Dubs Life's toll. You may stay and prophesy,
For such as you see visions.—Generals,
She's under the King's Peace!

(again to JUDITH.)

But learn to know

We put our faith in Great Nebuchadnezzar,
The King of Kings and God of Gods!

JUDITH

(in astonishment).

Art thou

The red slayer whose hand is murder and whose
tongue

Is death?

HOLOFERNES.

Go now in peace. Prepare for her
A room, Bagoas, in my tent. Provide her
With needed sustenance.

JUDITH.

I brought provisions
For all my meals according to our laws.
Pray, let my maid prepare them for me, lest
There be a cause for stumbling.

HOLOFERNES.

Be it so.

But if the things you brought with you should
fail

Whence shall we get the like? None of your
race

Is in my army.

JUDITH.

As thy soul lives, truly,
I will not spend those things that are with me
Until my God accomplish by my hand
His purpose.

[*Exeunt* JUDITH, MIRIAM, BAGOAS
into the farther tent door.]

JUDITH

HOLOFERNES

(to generals).

Generals, I thank you.

[*Exeunt generals.*

Belteshazzar,

I shall attend you further when these letters

Bearing your powers, are read.

[*Enter BAGOAS.*

(To BAGOAS.)

Bagoas!

[*Exeunt HOLOFERNES and BAGOAS
into tent.*

BELTESHAZZAR

(alone).

Faithful!

Thou 'rt so. But faith and conscience are twin
stairs

Of endless steps. And thou hast climbed, of
late,

But little, faithful Holofernes!

[*As he turns to go, enter ARAMES.*

ARAMES

(in a frenzy).

Speak

For me, pray, tell him, 'twas at your command,

By your compulsion, that I broke my faith
With noble Holofernes; tell him, 'twas
In the King's name you made me do this thing.

BELTESHAZZAR.

Away! The Great King knows not them that,
trembling
At another, trouble his design.

ARAMES.

It was
My trust in you that caused my ruin.

BELTESHAZZAR.

Lackey,
Not lord of deeds, is faith. A glance o' the
Great
Rends deedless knave's vaunt-furbished show of
service
To his shrinking nakedness.

ARAMES.

And all my past,
The patient structure of the faithful years

Fast orbing to fulfilment, crashes on me
In ruins, through one flaw, not in my will,
But in the occasion!

[HOLOFERNES, *unnoticed by those present, appears in the tent door, where he remains.*

BELTESHAZZAR.

Slaves may chew the cud
Of past exploits to eke the present lack
And haggard barrenness of action. But
The Great devour their yesterdays. Each day
Must bring his toll of deeds. Past faithfulness
Sets with his sun. His warranty of favor
Is not a changeless, backward running thread
Of sated memory, but a renewal,
An unspent purpose, an increase of strength,
An ever mounting urge of action, in which
The past but lives because a living present
Sustains it.

ARAMES.

Ah!

[*Covers his face.*

HOLOFERNES

(to himself).

What honest wisdom, yet
 What brazen falsehood; what illumined blindness,
 What viewless sight; what memory-dowered faith
 In unremembering unfaith!——

BELTESHAZZAR.

The King

Of Kings spurns such as you. An empire needs
 Fit men, and prompt, not paltering knaves that
 fancy
 Obsequious imbecility is service
 And empty proneness, faith! Hence!

ARAMES.

Ha! ha! ha!

An empire risen higher than the men
 That shoulder it! Buoyed on its conceit
 As on a breath of æther! Borne to heaven
 On the exhalations of its drunken brain,
 There to dispute the sun his fiery path!
 You have filled my soul with a fresh ardor, aye,

That shall flame till I see it tumbling down,
A crazy, ludicrous, abandoned wreck
Like a boy's kite that snaps its string! Ha! ha!
Ha! ha! ha!

[*Exit ARAMES in a burst of desperate laughter.*

HOLOFERNES

(*quietly*).

Belteshazzar!

[BELTESHAZZAR *starts*.

Would you plead
For him? He served you loyally, ev'n while
To me he proved a leaky vessel.

BELTESHAZZAR

(*dryly*).

A pot

That leaked in Bethel, no less leaks in Babel!
Nor does the King's acknowledgment outlive
The services it honors.

HOLOFERNES.

See to it, then,
You do not fail in yours. Your powers are
great. [Reading.

"Ordained that Holofernes shall admit him
To his counsels."

[BELTESHAZZAR *bows*.

HOLOFERNES

(suddenly turning on him).

You have proved my army's temper.
They'd follow ev'n against the King.

BELTESHAZZAR.

Yet lead them

You could not.

HOLOFERNES.

Who could hinder?

BELTESHAZZAR.

(with a dry smile).

Holofernes!

HOLOFERNES.

Faithless yourself, yet are you so acquainted
With faith you take its measure in the stress
Of others!

BELTESHAZZAR.

Nay, I take it in the reward
Which can command faith while its top remains
Unscaled.

HOLOFERNES.

Is that your wisdom's scope?

BELTESHAZZAR

(dryly).

A faith

Without a secure treasury of reward
Is a dark well without a bottom. Why
Should you attempt the Great King while his
power
Of giving gluts your power of taking?

HOLOFERNES.

Pray,

What asks the King of my fidelity?

BELTESHAZZAR.

He bids that his divine power shall not suffer
Abridgment through that petty tribe of rustics
Halting the progress of his will that must

Ride over them on its appointed way
Ev'n as the sovereign sun above their hills.

HOLOFERNES.

I shall require some time to weigh this matter.
Meanwhile, as you succeeded Arames
In council, pray, displace him in his tent.
Bagoas, you have heard?

BAGOAS.

I have.

HOLOFERNES

(as BAGOAS passes him, under his breath).

Watch him

And all his moves with sense more quick than
mongoose

An adder's lightning stroke.

*[Exeunt BAGOAS and BELTESHAZ-
ZAR.]*

HOLOFERNES

(alone).

Ah! Faithless Faith!

One breaks a lifelong habitude of Faith
At an imperious nod of eminence;

Another strips his soul for one that naught
Remains for others but inhuman craft
And treachery. One leads a hundred armies,
Inert but for his tyrant passion, blind
But for his vision, to a goal of glory;
Another braves alone, uncomforted,
The murderous wrath of multitudes. One
spurns

His dearest upon earth, giving no thought
To them; another flouts, at their behest,
The laws of God and man, drowning in blood
A guiltless world. To one, Thou 'rt wisdom,
deeper

Than knowledge, being hearted with God's
counsels;

To another, madness, fell as viper's fang,
Curdling with death Life's conduits. Thus I
see thee,

Two-faced, wearing a God-like countenance
Where sit beatitude and peace, to one,
To another, the black scowl of harsh coercion
And stony-eyed distrust; friend of the weak,
More often harlot to the faithless great
That twine thy docile meekness and devotion
Into a leading string for slaves, and cast

Thy dazzling name like gilded toy to fools
 Too weak to grasp necessity, too stubborn
 To bow to it, that they, absorbed like children
 At solemn play, run at the iron heel
 That grinds their souls into the kindred earth.

*[Pause, with a laugh, half ironic
 and half sympathetic.]*

Thou 'rt virtue for a little rustic race .
 Like those Bethulians among their hills
 Content upon their daily round of chores,
 Ruled by a God like them that keeps a
 shop
 And pennywise weighs out his honest wares.
 But let a project of the great on earth
 O'erflow upon thy scales, forthwith they break,
 Leaving the hardest will sole arbiter
 Of thy decrees!

*[JUDITH, unnoticed by HOLO-
 FERNES, appears in her tent
 door. HOLOFERNES continues,
 with a touch of bitterness.]*

And yet we slaves go on,
 Each treading breathlessly his squirrel's wheel,
 Dreaming we climb the stairs of steadfast honor
 To heaven's security and peace!

JUDITH
(*to herself*).

Is that
A fiend whose thought is horror and whose gaze
Is blood? My God, grant Thou me strength!

HOLOFERNES
(*continuing*).

But now
The dream is past, most watchful Belteshazzar,
And Holofernes waits not for his foe
To strike the first blow.

[*He discovers* JUDITH.
Pray, approach and tell me
Your wish.

JUDITH.
I have no will save to obey
The Lord. I must lead you and all your host
Through my doomed people's country till you
come
Over against Jerusalem. There I
Will set your seat within their midst, and you
Shall be to them as ravening wolf to sheep
That have no shepherd, and no dog shall open

His mouth before you. This the Lord has bid
me
Through my foreknowledge, and He sends me
hither
That I reveal it to you.

HOLOFERNES.

Is the time

Fulfilled?

[Enter in haste BAGOAS.]

BAGOAS.

Treason!

[Ceases on seeing JUDITH.]

JUDITH

(starting violently, shrieks).

No!

[Controlling herself.]

No, but in five days

At the utmost.

HOLOFERNES

(to BAGOAS).

You have news?

BAGOAS.

Of supreme import.

HOLOFERNES

(to JUDITH).

Withdraw, pray, for a space.

[Exit JUDITH.]

BAGOAS

(to himself).

She goes, reluctant,
Dragging, as 't were, her shadow that would stay
To backbite her. Why did she start and shriek
"No!" at my coming? . . .

HOLOFERNES.

What now?

BAGOAS.

The officers

Are closeted with Belteshazzar now
In his tent. As bees expectant of their queen
Returning from her sole portentous flight,
A quivering jostle and a fevered buzz
Upon the hive, I found them at his tent.
At my approach——

HOLOFERNES.

They slunk away like curs
Caught killing sheep they were to guard!

BAGOAS.

But when
I made pretense of leaving they returned
All shamming casual errands, in telltale
Convergence.

HOLOFERNES.

Find of this most strange accord
The secret motion.

BAGOAS.

Mighty Holofernes,
If I offend thee now, consider this:
There is a time when ev'n officious speech
And forward counsel harbor less offense
Than silence o'erdiscreet. Dismiss that woman
Without delay.

HOLOFERNES.

Does Holofernes' aide
Tremble before a woman?

BAGOAS.

My great master,
I am not wise as you and yet, my vision
Being less large and less illumined, see her
Shorn of the glamor that your radiant spirit
Mirrors on her.

HOLOFERNES

(smiling).

You twist your honest tongue
Into a subtle way of saying, friend,
That she has found me weak!

BAGOAS.

I do not trust her.
There's something sinister in that sharp splen-
dor,
Gorgeous like beauty of a poison flower.
A woman's God is where her heart abides.
If her God is against her people, 'tis
Her heart set Him upon the way. Such women
Trust not! Their faith is but a brazen mask
For devastating cruelty and crime
More wrackful than the hate of her that schemes
Murder and torment to preserve her people.

For such a hate is but a love, confined
By bonds unbearable till it bursts forth,
Showing its virtue in the very ruin
It works. I'd rather think she came, a spy,
A murderess. . . .

HOLOFERNES.

Suspicion has eaten deep
If it could gnaw a confidence like yours,
Bagoas.

BAGOAS.

There are whispers everywhere,
Shaking of heads, wise words, and veiled con-
fidings
Among the officers. A force, unseen,
Mysterious and many-centered, seems
To draw them on into a hundred knots.
When I approach 'tis like a sudden stone
Pitched mid a school of minnows, so they fly
Apart. On every lip, in every gesture,
In every eye, there seems to move and counsel,
And scheme the Great King's emissary. 'Tis
That woman that's the occasion. Cast her out,
I pray you, now.

HOLOFERNES.

I have a better plan.

Take orders to the army to prepare
For action on an instant's notice. Call
The officers to meet me here for counsel
And final disposition of the forces
At sunset. 'T will be fearful work. I hoped
To starve those bitter hillmen into mildness
To spare my army. Now upon its temper
Debased by idleness I'll try the tonic
That never fails, of steel. Follow.

*[Exeunt HOLOFERNES and BAGOAS,
into HOLOFERNES' tent.]*

*[Enter NOPHAH, KOZ, petty officers,
and soldiers who collect rugs
and national emblems.]*

NOPHAH

(to KOZ).

If you had not quenched the fires of my wrath,
by the burning belly of Baal . . .

KOZ.

Swear by your own. 'T would be a hotter
oath. 'T would take all the rivers of this plain
at spring flood to quench it,

JUDITH

NOPHAH.

Ah! Blood will do it; blood from those hills!

Koz.

Beware. 'Tis a scalding cup, that!

NOPHAH.

Did you see her?

Koz.

See her? Have you seen anything else?

NOPHAH.

If I were . . .

Koz.

Holofernes . . .

NOPHAH.

She wouldn't lack company long.

Koz.

The daring of her! If it had been such a son
of a tub and a bladder as . . .

NOPHAH.

Eh? . . .

Koz.

As . . . Nophah, those soldiers seem to know him, by their grinning. . . . But to come for roses to the very crest of war!

NOPHAH.

I verily believe women do not hate death as much as men do!

Koz.

Nor do they love life as much as men!

NOPHAH.

Well, we'll have a test soon, I wager.

Koz.

Give a man daylight and a free pair of hands and he'll stand up to anything; but take away his last fighting chance and he'll blubber you like a child in the dark.

NOPHAH

(eagerly).

True! I know it. That's what a man will do.

Koz.

I said, a man!

[Laughter among soldiers.]

NOPHAH.

Aye. A man. But what of a woman?

Koz.

If you'll but give her a good word she'll take to it as to moving into a new house. She'll dream on new furnishings and design garments befitting her new station. She'll speculate on her new neighbors and whether they have babies, and be absorbed in her first public appearance, and her only regret will be that she cannot oversee her own funeral.

NOPHAH.

But Holofernes is gentle with women.

Koz.

No strong man is gentle with a woman that maddens his desire, unless his desire be in his belly.

[Laughter.]

NOPHAH.

Hush!

[*Moving off.*]

KOZ.

Stay! Here's a chance to lodge complaints.
'Tis himself.

NOPHAH

(*to soldiers*).

Away! The chief! Quick! Or by the fiery
feet of Baal I'll . . .

[*Exit NOPHAH in haste.*]

KOZ.

He that hath no sense in his head, let him
have it in his feet.

[*Exeunt KOZ, petty officers, and
soldiers.*]

[*Enter from the tent, HOLOFERNES
and BAGOAS.*]

HOLOFERNES

(*handing orders to BAGOAS*).

Have these despatched at once! Recall the
woman!

JUDITH

BAGOAS

(knocking at JUDITH's door).

Return, pray.

[Exit BAGOAS.]

[Enter JUDITH.]

HOLOFERNES.

Approach!

JUDITH

(under her breath).

He's gone!

HOLOFERNES.

What is the matter?

That brow that from the uproar of angry men
Took not one twitch of fear is drawn as if
It strained o'er desperate resolve.

JUDITH.

I would prove
My power of prophecy, God-given. . . .

HOLOFERNES.

Speak!

JUDITH.

Bagoas spoke of . . .

HOLOFERNES.

Treason.

JUDITH.

Pray, tell me
What troubles you? A prophetess should know
Both hostile influences, and propitious.

HOLOFERNES.

Thus far the prophetess and warrior match.

JUDITH.

A woman, God-inspired, may find a way
Where a man's practised wisdom, self-reliant,
Halts baffled.

HOLOFERNES.

'T has been found. I can no longer
Delay the attack.

JUDITH.

You mean . . .

HOLOFERNES.

The camp is arming

Now.

JUDITH.

Ah!

HOLOFERNES

(to himself).

Again that stress!

JUDITH.

Do not invoke

Jehovah's wrath! Forbear! The time is not
Fulfilled.

HOLOFERNES.

What are you that you love an idol
More than your brothers, and have more con-
cernFor me, his and your brothers' enemy,
Than your own lords?

JUDITH.

Ask not, but trust your servant
Sent by the Lord to do His will.

HOLOFERNES.

A soldier
Trusts none except himself. His sight grows
dull
Beneath the shadow of another's vision
In borrowed faith's twilight.

JUDITH.

By the Lord's wrath,
You must delay.

HOLOFERNES.

My staff will meet this even
For final consultation.

JUDITH.

God sustain me! . . .
You'd brave the Lord rather than underlings
By change of orders!

HOLOFERNES.

Truly, bold thou art,
Defenseless woman!

JUDITH.

Bold, not for myself
But for . . . the Chosen of the Lord.

HOLOFERNES.

A trust
Like yours enfolds a greater claim!

JUDITH.

No less
Than acquiescence in my ministry,
By God imposed.

HOLOFERNES.

A harlot, this? Did lust
E'er smolder under arches like this brow?
Where lust once enters it can never be
Expelled. These eyes have, deep and still be-
neath
The tortured tumult of their present stress,
The peace of honor and the habitude
Of purity.

JUDITH.

Pray, let me share your counsels
That from the fullness of such intimacy
I weave the stuff of my prophetic prayer
For the Lord's Chosen.

HOLOFERNES.

Beware! No man withstands
Intimate ministration long from women
Like you.

[*Approaches her.*]

JUDITH

(*shrinking back*).

No! Pray, no! Not with eyes that burn!
O, God on High, have pity on Thy daughter,
Have pity!

HOLOFERNES.

What are you? There is none such
For power of soul and beauty of countenance
Within earth's confines. Woman! . . .

JUDITH.

Pray, forbear!

HOLOFERNES.

A soldier's hand ne'er lags behind his wish.
If I would take you now what power could stay
My hand?

JUDITH

JUDITH

(pauses, then triumphantly).

Yourself, Great Holofernes!

HOLOFERNES.

Woman,

You are the second to say that, this hour.
The first was knave the more for that he played
Upon another's faith that he besmirched.
And he required less time to frame his answer!

JUDITH.

And I! . . . Your honor 's blazoned on your
brow
For all alike to read.

HOLOFERNES.

My honor deems
That speaking to the man in me, you doffed
The prophetess to don the woman.

JUDITH

(startled).

Ah! . . .

Hear me! I' the name of the Most High, 'tis
now

The prophetess bids you, His Chosen, wait
Until the time's fulfilled.

HOLOFERNES.

Pray you for me
And prophesy now. For the time has come.

JUDITH.

God of my Fathers, is Thy purpose orbing
So soon unto its bitterest fullness? Father,
Dost press the last dread dregs against my
lips? . . .

Is there no other way, no way of honor? . . .

(In an altered tone, to HOLOFERNES.)

You heard the woman's plea, who spurned the
other!

Pray, then, indulge a woman's mood! Divert
me

From the dark shadow of the day's exactions
By a recital of the proudest hour
In your proud years of conquest.

HOLOFERNES.

'Twas when I
Halted beside the pyramids.

JUDITH

(*with admiring mockery*).

“When I

Halted beside the pyramids!” Is that
The pride of him that held within his hand
The power of Pharaoh’s ancient house? Is
that

The record of a deed the reeling sun
Dared hardly tell the stars and they in turn
Breathe back in whispers to the quaking earth?
The deeds of vanquished Pharaoh, by you van-
quished,

Are worth a thousand tales, and yours no more
Than one bare sentence!

[*Goes to tent door pretending to
weave.*

I am famed among

A race of weavers.

[*HOLOFERNES approaches; JUDITH
playfully, with gesture.*

Nay, a weaver needs
Space for his stuff. . . . So far!

[*HOLOFERNES halts.*

I’d weave the record
Of pyramids, rose-tipped with dawn, greeting

Their lord after a thousand years of Pharoahs.
Thus, filling the front wall.

HOLOFERNES.

And I shall see
Nothing but rose-tipped fingers twining riddles
Of changeful weft of sunlight, mood, and
speech,
In charmed concurrence.

JUDITH.

After that, what day
Rose radiant like a star?

HOLOFERNES.

'Twas when we drove
The Phenicians into the Syrian sea
Which welcomed us beyond their trapped
despair
In sunset splendor which yet could not dull
My dazzling host.

JUDITH.

Your vision takes a splendor
That suits the deed. You drove them! . . .
Like a shepherd

His fattening herd, compact, before him, leaving

An ever lengthening ribbon of lean pasture
Behind? Or like a fiery mountain's entrails
That from your Northern snows burst forth,
sending

A fuming flood of molten death that spreads
A fan upon the suffocating earth
Till ev'n the insensate sea in hissing horror
Withdraws his jeweled hem from an invader
He cannot halt?

HOLOFERNES.

Woman, what are the stories
Of conquered lands or seas subdued, if I
Can watch your garment's hem faithfully writing

The record of your motions while my hands
Begrudge the fickle sands their privilege.

JUDITH.

Where did you learn the speech that conquers
women,
Harsh conqueror?

HOLOFERNES

(approaching).

Say that again!

JUDITH

(shuddering).

Away!

[Controlling herself.

The second panel, that; the third . . .

HOLOFERNES

(eagerly).

A valley

Weave, smiling on me in her harvest peace,
Golden, content; Mesopotamia,
A fruitful woman in the vast embrace
Of husband-river whose one arm 's Euphrates,
The other Tigris——

JUDITH.

And you, northern bear,
Snatched her from him to crush her in your
clutch
Of iron; or did you come like April flood,
Melting the sides of mountains that they overwhelm

Expiring valleys that were scarce awake
By touch of spring.

HOLOFERNES.

True, we destroy, but power
As the Great King's is like a swollen river
That takes but to return, where it subdues,
A harvest hundredfold.

JUDITH

(to herself).

Are you God's foe
That slays but for the lust of blood; the victor,
Uproots the peace and happiness of men
To heap on glory's wanton pyre? You, too,
Are bound in faith's relentless bonds!

HOLOFERNES.

With thee,
Thy love transfiguring my loyal will,
I'd conquer the remains of the earth. For
thee . . .

JUDITH.

Forbear! . . . My God, must I invoke this
shame? . . .

(*To HOLOFERNES, desperately.*)

I will not hear you. You shall be a fiend,
Red, smeared with blood, blasphemer of the
Lord,
Death's servant! Aye! Thus will I see
you . . .

HOLOFERNES.

For thee,
For thy immortal glory will I make
A record of my deeds. On the last wall,
The eastern frontier of the world that gleamed
On Elam's conquered graves, matching white
clouds
With shoulders. . . .

JUDITH

(*drawing her garment over her shoulders, with
forced playfulness.*)

Soldier, you embroider better
Than I. . . .

HOLOFERNES.

Woman, thou hast awaked in me
Resplendent visions of pure loveliness

That come to no man more than once. The day,
Young on the heights of morn, is no more
 radiant
Than this!

JUDITH.

Spare me! The prophetess of God
Such pleadings may not hear.

HOLOFERNES.

'Tis to the woman,
I speak.

[Approaches her.]

JUDITH.

Forbear!

HOLOFERNES.

I see the prophetess
Staring with eyes of horror, but beyond,
The woman waits with passionate eyes that seek
Mine past the other's shoulder. Nay, nor waits,
But moves to meet me.

JUDITH

(in desperation).

God, when Thou didst print
The seal of Thy command upon my soul,

Why didst not also set the seal of blindness
Upon my heart?

[She breaks down.]

HOLOFERNES.

My love shall make thine eyes
To see. Thou Crown of Victory! Beloved,
Thou ravishest my soul.

[Seizes her, covering her with passionate kisses.]

JUDITH

(yielding momentarily, then struggling desperately).

My God, sustain me!

(To HOLOFERNES.)

No! Stay! Thou shalt not . . .

HOLOFERNES

(triumphantly).

Ah! The woman pleads
For me. 'Tis but the vanquished prophetess
Would spite us.

JUDITH.

No! . . . No!

*[She flings him from her. Her
clinchd right fist rises as if it
held a weapon. She stands in
an attitude of menace.]*

HOLOFERNES.

That hand has closed on swords,
And craves one now!

JUDITH

(slowly dropping her hand).

No! Prophetess and woman
Are one, and must obey the Lord.

HOLOFERNES.

If you
Deceive me treason's punishment will pale
Beside your penalty.

JUDITH

(on her knees).

Strike me, now, here!
Never was penalty more just.

HOLOFERNES

(misunderstanding).

Woman,

Your task is heavy, but your people brought
This thing upon themselves. I never raise
My spear against them that bow to the King.

JUDITH

(on the ground).

My God, I cannot do it. My bosom is rent
In twain. This cannot be Thy will. Pray, heed
My prayer. Wouldst Thou destroy so great a
thing?

Will not the Ages bend their stricken gaze
On Thee, asking: "How couldst Thou shatter
that

We labored to bring forth?"

HOLOFERNES.

Beside such anguish

I hear no prophecy. I will attack
As if your God were not.

JUDITH

(abruptly, sitting up).

No!

[Rising to her feet.

No! Delay!

I shall not fail! . . .

[With fervor.

Defer the attack one day,
But one day longer. I must pray to God
This night. He will give help.

HOLOFERNES.

I will postpone

The battle yet one day.

JUDITH.

Ah! . . . Yet one day! . . .
Pray, grant me leave.

[Starts to go.

HOLOFERNES.

Stay, you have naught to fear
From me.

JUDITH.

Into the solitude of prayer
I must retire.

HOLOFERNES.

By granting your request
I thought to buy your staying.

[Smiling.

Tempt me not

Lest I repent.

JUDITH.

The more I must make haste
To outrun the hazards of a change!

[Passing on.

HOLOFERNES.

I'll give

Command that none molest you, day or night,
On penalty of death.

JUDITH.

I thank you.

[Exit JUDITH into her tent.

HOLOFERNES.

Gone,

As if to shun her very shadow. . . . Woman,
I cannot read thy heart, but this I read;

Thou must be mine. And thou shalt weave for
me

The fifth and crowning panel of my wars,
The conquest of thy people. And it shall be
The canopy above our common bed.

Thy glory shall be mine, and mine be thine
Thus. But of all my glories thou shalt be
The crown. The King of Kings shall envy me
When I set thee, the first of Asshur's daughters,
Within his house.

(CURTAIN)

ACT III

Act III

AFTER nightfall of the following day. An open place on the edge of Holofernes' camp, facing toward the Bethulian mountains. On the left, a large well, protected by masonry, facing toward the right. The light of one distant camp fire and the diffused flicker of many others are seen at right back. In the far distance back, the Bethulian mountains, barely perceptible, raise their shadowy forms against the cloudless sky glimmering with stars. The low hum of camp life gradually settling to rest fills the atmosphere.

[Enter FIRST MEDE and PERSIAN.]

FIRST PERSIAN.

This is the well appointed for the meeting
By Belteshazzar.

FIRST MEDE.

This? By Holofernes
Devoted to that woman's privacy
On penalty of death? . . .

FIRST PERSIAN.

Is more secure
Than a God's inmost shrine, for this well's
Goddess
Leaves the protecting awe of his command,
But not a God's unwinking watch upon it
While she drinks at a hotter fountain.

FIRST MEDE.

Is she
With Holofernes now?

FIRST PERSIAN.

He summoned her
Three hours since.

FIRST MEDE.

And last night?

FIRST PERSIAN.

She spent alone
Priming her person sullied by the road
With baths and obscure ministrations. Would
I were in Holofernes' place!

[*Enter ASSYRIANS and others.*]

FIRST PERSIAN

(to MEDE, indicating PILESER).

You hear them?

[*Enter others, joining Assyrian group.*]

PILESER.

The attack postponed another day?

NEBO.

Alas!

FIRST MEDE

(to PERSIAN).

Does Belteshazzar know?

FIRST PERSIAN.

Belteshazzar?

He knows by quicker than corporeal sense,
By which he spies on the first dawn of thought
And eavesdrops on the future spring of will
While yet it trickles down the unwarned mind's
Obscurest caverns.

FIRST MEDE.

Filching premature,
Yet vital, birth from his chief's pregnant passion!

FIRST PERSIAN.

Rather, he taps another's lusty tides
Into the shriveled conduits of his brain,
Thwarting their proper lord.

FIRST MEDE.

A bowelless,
Vicarious shift.

FIRST PERSIAN.

But one that speeds his purpose
Which like a soldier stripped of slow encumbrance
Moves faster——

FIRST MEDE.

Soon to starve at leisure. Mark:
The mind 's the bowels' almoner, much given
To pauper pride and pomp, and flickering
The oblique, bewildering lights of his contempt

Upon his slower guardian: Belteshazzar
But lives by Holofernes. Severed thence
He'd be as vacant as a June fly's shell
That's danced away his borrowed life. I hold
With Holofernes.

FIRST PERSIAN.

While I have to eat
The bread of slavery I, too, the richer
Supply, and more secure, embrace.
[*A stir among the Assyrian group.*
Look, there!

FIRST MEDE.

'Tis Belteshazzar!

FIRST PERSIAN.

Wrinkled vulture neck
A-nod, disgorging pellets of gray smiles,
Thinking on foulness!
[*Enter BELTESHAZZAR.*

FIRST MEDE.

Hush! Let's move and raise
Our voices lest his beak assay us carrion.

BELTESHAZZAR.

Up, to our task! While our great general
Inactive halts at victory's very gate
The Great King's power is stayed on those wan
crag
That ev'n upon the gentle brow of night
Trace harsh defiance. But the King's wrath
poises
On brazen wings, his eye is on us now——

FIRST PERSIAN.

(to MEDE).

Nay, 'tis a gimlet in a leathern haft——

BELTESHAZZAR.

And when nor where he pounces no man knows.
But this I know that we shall be to him
As flock of quail, and all being answerable,
He will not weigh or less or greater guilt,
But let his talons choose. That is my message
To you!

FIRST MEDE.

A message is but half that bears
A sword, without a shield against it

PILESER.

We wait

Your counsel what to do.

OTHERS.

We'd serve the King.

Advise us!

BELTESHAZZAR.

'Tis that woman melts his will
In a dissolving bath of hot desire.
She came but yesterday; she spoke to him
A brief hour's space; 'twas she, as by a string
A captive ball in play, drew back his order
To attack, scarce issued. In the open thus
She wrought on him, before his tent; to-night
She is within. If he did not withstand
Behind the bulwark of publicity
Will he hold out against the subtle siege
The better, single-handed now and breached
I' the first encounter?

GENERALS.

No! No!

FIRST PERSIAN

(to MEDE).

Play again!

The Assyrian harp 's well tuned and not a flaw
 Mars that auxiliary sounding board.

FIRST MEDE

(to PERSIAN).

But what is

His tune?

BELTESHAZZAR.

Steeping his sense in lust, she seeks
 Soft moods of converse hedged with intimacy
 To plead her people's cause. We must keep
 stanch

His purpose with the prop of joint resolve:
 He must dismiss her and attack at once.

GENERALS.

Thus be it resolved! As one man will we speak.

BELTESHAZZAR.

He cannot stand before such union, bound
 By the King's will as with steel hoops!

FIRST PERSIAN

(to MEDE).

Brave rats!

Would salve a man-o'-war!

FIRST MEDE.

They would not dare
Board Holofernes derelict, for fear
His sinking hulk might suck them down, much
less

Tow him ashore while his will, passion-nerved,
Is at the helm.

BELTESHAZZAR.

Pileses, being highest
In rank, will be our spokesman.

GENERALS.

Aye! aye!

PILESER.

Nay;

I do not like his humor's present color;
'T would stain, I fear, the motive of my errand.
Pray, choose one less exposed to imputation
Of envious rivalry.

BELTESHAZZAR.

The crown of office
With incorruptible regard would seek
The bolder brow and wiser. Nebo, speak,
Is yours a master's heart, or menial's?

NEBO.

In his eye he bears what breaks the stoutest
locks
Upon the secret places of your mind,
However bold an eye and tongue stand guard
Upon them. No man could withhold from him
Even while his dilate desperate eye, unwinking,
Could brave his gaze, the author of this plea.
'Tis yours. You fathered it; be you its sponsor.

GENERALS.

Aye! Belteshazzar!

BELTESHAZZAR.

Listen! High reward
Awaits him only that will clear the way
Before a Great One's foot; contempt, the lag-
gard
Whose menial feet but tread it smooth. Who
craves

The eminence where soon the Great King's
favor
May light?

GENERALS.

Speak, Belteshazzar, for us!

BELTESHAZZAR.

Nay,
My speech would bear to his suspicion naught
But my sole wish. But you. . . .
[He mingles with generals.]

FIRST PERSIAN

(to FIRST MEDE).

Solve me a riddle:
A mangy cur to escape prompt flaying, had
To win a mastiff's pelt in rutting season.
What would he do?

FIRST MEDE.

Wait till you see the answer.
He's but a tyrant's willing tool while we
Unwilling, yet as fitly accommodate
His iron grasp. He's in direct descent,

Legitimate, from tyrant statecraft; we,
But bastards got with faithless cowardice.
Whose is the greater honor, his, whose will
Is married to his heart, however barren,
Or his that's rent to his soul's very core?

ORDERLY

(*as guard*).

Belteshazzar?

BELTESHAZZAR.

Your message!

ORDERLY.

She's coming hither.

BELTESHAZZAR.

Close

Upon your heels?

ORDERLY.

No; unless she mend her pace.
When I lost sight of her she looked as one
Whose soul had flown to strive with a fierce genii
Upon some fiery sphere, leaving her body
Tortured, still aping in an empty show

The spirit's torments, unaware of place,
Unstrung of purpose.

BELTESHAZZAR.

Did you see her issue
From Holofernes' tent?

ORDERLY.

'Twas like a flame
Bursting a far-flung breach through vain confinement.

I followed to the top o' my wind, until
Passing the camp's restraining gaze, she fell,
Wringing her hands, then tottering rose again,
And stood. But now a sudden marvelous change
Came on her. Tense, each fiber answering
A proud corporeal purpose, closely knit
Like diver poised upon the leap, she stood,
Above her height. Her face alone awhile,
Tumultuous with many a twisted form
As mists tormented in the grip of dawn,
Then paling with a rigor overtense,
At last, as with foreknowledge of escape
Into a larger and serener morn,
Kindled with e'er expanding light. Slowly

As the young day advances on the plain,
She went her way.

BELTESHAZZAR.

Your head 's touched, too, I see,
By witchery. The tail of your report
Denies its head.

ORDERLY.

The tail in truth rejoins it.
After some dozen steps, all suddenly
She flung herself upon the ground, her body
Sick seeming with some wild desire. Again
To her feet she sprang, her body cramped, her
eyes
Each like a flame around a dagger's point,
Striking her breast with maddened fists, in-
voking
Jehovah's wrath.—At that, seeing the old crone
She brought with her, approaching, I came
hither.

BELTESHAZZAR.

Thank you! Go, watch her further progress.

ORDERLY.

I will.

[*Exit orderly.*]

BELTESHAZZAR.

Pray, leave me, generals. I shall bring these
matters

To what conclusion you will learn to-morrow.

Take care, by swift dispersion you distract

Suspicion prowling in the dark.

[*Exeunt generals.*]

BELTESHAZZAR

(alone).

Ha! ha!

Ha! ha! Wise Belteshazzar! Belteshazzar,
The Great King's eye that never sleeps! Ha!
ha!

Ha! ha! The next time thou wouldst bait the
old wolf

That troubles thy Lord's dreams, run with the
hounds

And not with rabbits for all that thine eyes
Favor theirs, being sleepless! Noble rabbits!
How readily did ye take the trail I gave

Last, leading wide of that fierce scent.

[*Shrewdly.*

Ha! ha!

I'll be your spokesman with your chief, and this
Will be my plea: "Thy greatness, Holofernes,
Outleaps a coward's scope of fear, o'ervaults
The horizon of a brave man's zest; severs,
As a young man the cobwebs of a dream
At dawn, a myriad oversubtle bonds
Tissued by plenary overcautious council
Sweating an empire's wisdom; soberly
Outsails a visionary's skyward bubble,
Laying upon the all-o'ersoaring air
A winged yoke. The Great King's present
needs

Surround thee as a multitude agape,
Their gaze centering on thee. Necessity,
Unscorned alone of pleaders, points to thee.
There's none to take thy place. But see to it
Heedless security lose not from thee
What ne'er foe forces. Mutiny, begot
By idleness upon high spirits, plants
Her poisoned goad in every breast. Attack
To-morrow: Thou canst take whate'er thou
wilt,

From idol's leisure to a kingdom's rule.
Delay again: The Great King, if he might,
Would not save thee! (*Pause.*) He must at-
tack!

[*Reënter orderly, hurriedly.*

ORDERLY.

She's coming,
Heedless, dogged by the old crone.

BELTESHAZZAR.

Thank you. Be gone!

[*Exit orderly.*

BELTESHAZZAR

(*seeking shelter at the well, watching JUDITH'S
approach*).

I'll see this witch that folded back the wings,
Already spread, of Holofernes' action,
And from that guard's slag-smothered hearth
of thought
Startled a crackling flight of sparks!

[*With a start.*

Ah! (*Pause.*)

I have 't! She . . . the King's ally!

[*Quizzically.*

Belteshazzar,

How apt thou art, e'er seeing the first thing—
last! . . .

The pawns of calculation are thy men
In one dull, rigid groove of motion bound,
While pines the supple queen of pregnant vision,
Passed by a discernment that has lost its edge
From o'ermuch grinding! Ha! I see a way
To make her drive him to her brothers'
slaughter.

I will withdraw. This thing requires more
thought.

[*Exit* BELTESHAZZAR.

[*Enter* JUDITH, followed by
MIRIAM.

JUDITH

(*stopping on her way to the well*).

God of my fathers, hear me, for my soul
Is rent asunder. Thou alone, O God,
Canst make me whole. Thy hand did find me
whole,

Though crushed in the last pit of black despair,
When Thou didst lay on me this deed. Alas!

Single it shone, that deed, a star, immediate,
From highest heaven into my lowest pit,
And thus my undivided mind shot back
Its single purpose, knowing naught between,
Naught but black vacancy. But now, each mo-
tion

Splits on a thousand e'er dividing paths,
The very air thickens with multitudes
In ever increasing league of circumvention,
Hostile and gentle, both. Deep in my heart
A flame-eyed presence waits I dare not face,
Cannot ignore, and exiled from myself
I stray among the stones of desolation.

MIRIAM.

Daughter, I do not know nor ask your mission
To the enemy of God, but this I know
'T wore falcon's wings the first day, now, the
second,
It lags on feet of lead; will it lie prone
To-morrow?

JUDITH.

Miriam, look at me. This body,
Though sprung from another womb, had all its
roots

In that old bosom, then as young as this,
And all my being drew its nourishment
From that abundant spring of strength and
virtue.

My mother so, and so, my mother's mother
Before, holding the richer share in her
And me: Didst ever see a good woman turn
Harlot?

MIRIAM.

And did you ever see a good woman
Craved not love's fullest measure? How could
such

Turn harlot while her body's single love
Followed her soul's faith?

JUDITH.

Undivided heart
Alone keeps honor in. Division invites
Shame, straw-crowned, loitering at the curb.

[In desperation.]

I cannot,
I cannot do this thing. For my soul's hatred
Will snatch my body from Jehovah's foe
At the hour of sacrifice, in bootless honor,
Destroying all;—or will my body bring

My soul, accomplice in its shame, to fatten
And rot on the reward?

(*To MIRIAM.*)

Miriam, mother,
Is 't true God crushes shoulders first that He
May lay on them a task beyond their strength?
May He not need a wanton to achieve
A deed too fearful for an honest woman;
And can He spurn the harlot with His foot
Saying: "The deed's mine, the shame, thine,"
when she comes
Spent, bearing trophies she abhors, more galling
Than the task's burden?

MIRIAM

(*maternally*).

Do I hear again
A little maiden at my knee, laying
On the gaunt Present at its naked noon
An endless cloak of shadow-hued surmise
Trailing beyond the rim of vision? Daughter,
As mists of morn are to the blazing noon,
So to His word the vapors of our questioning.
Beware to whom 'tis given, that he fulfil it,
Lest tarrying he be consumed!

JUDITH.

His word!

Is it a flame imperishable, fed
By its own changeless nature, set in man
As in an alien socket, sending forth
A jewel's barren rays? Or is it,
When burst the murky torments of man's labors
Into a mounting single spire of faith,
Its inmost heart of pure celestial light?
Fed by his being, answering his every change,
Whate'er the seeming: still the word divine
Must dwell at the core.

MIRIAM

(aghast).

Ne'er child of Juda spoke
Such daring word.

JUDITH.

Nor e'er such fearful deed
Was laid on Juda's daughter!

[Praying.

O Thou, that brim'st
This valley's legion-hearted cup of strife
With rest, canst Thou not fill this desolate bosom
With quiet? Thou hast set the dome of peace

Upon the hills, canst Thou not stay in me
This conflict battering at the vault of heaven?
Thy spirit walks upon the starry ways,
Behold, I cannot follow, for the deed
Thou hast laid upon me bears me to the ground.
Thy ways are myriad as the stars, is this
The only way to save Thy people?

[*Pause.*]

MIRIAM

(*comforting her*).

Daughter,
'Tis not thy strength faints, but thy heart.
Jehovah
E'er proves the branch on which His word 's to
light,
Nor ever fails or changes.

JUDITH

(*in a changed tone*).

Can one hate
Whom one knows, unto death?

MIRIAM.

If the higher duty
Is hate, forestall the knowledge!

JUDITH.

The wilful blind
Shall oversee the seeing? And can one murder
Without hate?

MIRIAM

*(aghast).*Murder! *(Pause.)*Murder? *(Pause.)*

Up, rejoice,

For as His word to thee is terrible
Beyond Judea's daughters, so thy name
Shall blazon from the burnished dome of time.

JUDITH.

To him that drowns, the beacon mocks more
cruel
Than viewless dark.

MIRIAM.

Lift up thy voice and praise Him
That granted thee an undivided heart
Beyond all men. For only such as thou
Can send a single silent shaft of vision
Into His very bosom there to illumine

His deepest word, while others a brief flare
Noisy, uncertain, spread, emblazoning
Their own pates, naught above.

JUDITH.

But if mine eye,
Single no longer, all division's hosts
Ceaseless hurl at my heart?

MIRIAM

(fanatically).

Then pluck it out,
And blind, again be whole!

JUDITH

(absorbed).

I thought to find
A slayer, smeared with blood, his eye aglare
With the red lust of killing; lo, how pale
And gentle that beside this dragon brood
Conceived of mine own being! I found a man
Great, with a great man's single hard resolve
Unspoiled by use of guile: and I, with treason,
Must poison it! He comes, bearing to me
The torch of a great passion, and I must
quench it,

A thief, at night, when it should light the path
Of empire. Mighty is the love he offers,
Boundless its fruits, and I with treacherous
hand,

Must put on them the worm of foul decay;
And in the bosom of his protection, I
Must plant the fang of death.

[*Pause.*

MIRIAM

(*going to her*).

Daughter, dost see
Thy foe with thy God's and His people's eye,
Or with a new eye of thine own desire?

JUDITH

(*obstinately*).

I see him as a man I'm told to hate
Because he serves his people.

MIRIAM.

As thou serve thine!

JUDITH.

His service wears the candid brow of honor,
Not cunning mask of treason.

MIRIAM.

The crown of life
Surmounts them both!

JUDITH.

The crown of life! Nay, rather,
The yoke of craven living!

MIRIAM.

Are thine eyes
So mad with new desire they put behind them
Those yesterdays seared with thy brothers'
pains?

JUDITH.

Let Pain preside in judgment on our deeds
And all our faithless, honey-tongued defaults
Will smirk in crowns of virtue, while the spirit,
Sole versed in his own law of rectitude,
Will be decreed a bawd.

MIRIAM.

Daughter, thy God
Holds out to thee, bidding thee choose, in one
hand

Thy brothers' agony and death, in the other,
Their safety, and for thee, a timeless name:
Thou seest each, and yet art wavering!

JUDITH

(desperately).

On the forefront of battle, Death looks fair,
And a brave common purpose balms the blow
He strikes upon the forehead; O my brothers,
I've seen your gaze embattled. Would you see
Your sister, foul with treachery and blood,
Cast out by every living creature, crawl,
Like murderous poisoned cur to some black hole
To rot forgotten: would you see her thus
That you may live?

MIRIAM

(wringing her hands).

Judith, my child, my child!
From thine own self apostate. O my child!

JUDITH

(continuing).

'Tis but an unwilling, uncorrupting shame,
Sisters, will come upon your bodies, soon

To pass, like a brief, bitter gust of hail;
While I must willing offer mine, ev'n planting
The first seeds of desire into his mind
Prepared by mine own lecherous cunning.

Miriam,

They cannot ask this thing of me whose body
Was taught by thee, by the husband of my
youth,

By the chaste custom of a constant life,
To make its love sole keeper of its service.
God of my Fathers, Thou didst set the bar
Of death against such willing shame; how can,
How can this be Thy word?

[Breaks down, weeping.]

MIRIAM

(on her knees, wringing her hands).

Is there no way?

Jehovah, speak! Thy child is cast away
In darkness.

*[Remaining in an attitude of
prayer.]*

*[Enter BELTESHAZZAR, slowly,
unnoticed by JUDITH and
MIRIAM.]*

JUDITH

BELTESHAZZAR

(to himself).

'Tis a sick and drooping triumph
That trails its colors in the dust.

(Calling to JUDITH.)

Woman! . . .

Power never menaced, misery past repair,
Alike are deaf. . . .

[Approaching nearer.

Woman!—Add to such charm
Such deafness: every man to his own suit
Will be the tireless echo.

[Touching her on the shoulder.

JUDITH

(starting up).

Hol——! . . .

BELTESHAZZAR.

'Tis I,
Unbid, would thrust a word of helpful purport
Athwart your revery's gloom.

JUDITH

(rising, proud).

This place is hedged
With safety by Great Holofernes' order.

BELTESHAZZAR.

My present speech would add more safety.

JUDITH

(smiling proudly).

Add,

Where Holofernes finished?

BELTESHAZZAR.

Pray, answer me:

The attack has been postponed once more?

JUDITH.

It has.

BELTESHAZZAR.

At your wish?

JUDITH.

Yes.

BELTESHAZZAR.

You wield a mastery

Beyond all men over men's greatest master,
But while the power and wealth of a great
empire

Reach out a thousand golden willing arms
You court his and your ruin.

JUDITH

(with haughty indifference).

Yes?

BELTESHAZZAR.

Such calm
Becomes the sole top, or the lowest bottom,
Of fortune's wheel.

JUDITH

(as before).

I wait your word.

BELTESHAZZAR.

You've staid
The hand of death, by Holofernes raised
Over your people twice, and you may stay it
Again, and yet again; but then no more
For the Great King would cut him down.

JUDITH

(absorbed).

If I

Stayed him thrice more——

BELTESHAZZAR.

You had done what foeman's sword
Could compass never, slain great Holo-
fernes——

JUDITH.

And you should tell that me?

BELTESHAZZAR

(*dryly*).

I need your aid
To save your greatest foe!

JUDITH

(*speechless at first; then, trying to regain her
composure*).

To save!

[*Pause.*

A plotter

Avows a simple end. A trapper breaks
His traps: Look to thy footing!

BELTESHAZZAR.

Wavering feet
Are pitfall's harvest; resolute feet find eyes
To speed them safe.

JUDITH.

Your will and wit are at odds:
Your will me intends, your wit looks toward
yourself.

BELTESHAZZAR.

Listen: You've set your fate beneath the eaves
Of Holofernes' strength; the selfsame bolt
That smites him down, consumes your stolen
refuge;
Think you the smiter his poised arm will stay
For her that forged the bolt?

JUDITH

(passionately).

Think you that she
That kindled wrath would look for mercy's
flame?

BELTESHAZZAR

(shrewdly).

You're brave; too brave for what you'd seem.
Such valor
Spurns treason from his door.—'Tis for your
brothers,

Beside yourself, you heap extinction's pyre
With each delay's fresh yield of wrath.

JUDITH

(aghast).

My brothers!

(Then, controlling herself, to BELTESHAZZAR.)

My people are naught to me who bear against
them

The banner of Jehovah's wrath.

BELTESHAZZAR

(cynically).

A bauble,

A pretty bauble, "prophetess," to draw

The simple-minded, gaping, from their errands!

(Seriously.)

Cast it away ere the duped idlers turn

The rage of conscience-maddened idleness

On you and yours. 'Tis instant, resolute action

To you has tossed the boon, delay forever

Has forfeited. The choice is yours alone,

To seize it safe or let it shattering fall

Beyond recovery.

JUDITH

(praying).

Is the dark so heavy
Because it holds Thee? Is this silence Thine
That it should press so close? And is Thy word
Both on a plotter's tongue and in Thy silence?

BELTESHAZZAR.

The hand that brings the power of those wan
hills
To-morrow to the Great King, bears away
A kingdom—and she that guides it, for herself
Could gain a boon would dwarf her power of
wishing.

JUDITH

(with desperate scorn).

Shrewdness o'erkeen stabs, doubling, his own
side:
To speed "my wish," straight homing to "my
people"
You'd have me do what makes it vain; to save
them,
You'd have me haste their slaying! You, astute
Beyond men, read me truly!
[Bursts into hysterical laughter.

BELTESHAZZAR.

He's a fool
That spurns a raft because his ship won't weather
The tempest. You could turn away revenge
From those the battle spares. I bear to you
The Great King's gratitude!

JUDITH.

A distant word,
And empty: The Great King!

BELTESHAZZAR

(approaching nearer).

Or, Holofernes!
Has that a closer ring? You hold the bait
Will fetch the old wolf. Dangle it, just out of
reach,
Leading him, panting, up those hills. He'll
follow;
You've heard the pant of his desire; you know
How he will follow!

JUDITH.

Panderer, is that
Thy wisdom?

BELTESHAZZAR.

The sole wisdom, will avail
To save a remnant of your race he has sworn
To slay as one man.—Do not waste your wares
Until you stop upon those conquered hills;
Then drive your bargain, drive it hard! His
honor

Will stand by his hot words when the desire
That shot them forth, has fallen, a dying fountain.

Your wares are worthy of Holofernes' having:
They are worthy of his price.

JUDITH.

God of my Fathers,
Is Thy word single, or a treacherous sword
Piercing its wielder, through the hilt? Beneath
A father's pitying prevarication
Toward his child, dost speak, for Fate's sole ear,
Another speech that turns whoever hears it,
To stone?

BELTESHAZZAR.

Woman, go to! Half dead with thirst
Thou'dst yet stick at a pool because 'tis roiled!—
Before three days have passed there'll be a new
chief

Who'll burn with ardor opposite to the present:
To add, by breathless zeal in the King's cause,
What he falls short of Holofernes' stature.

The smaller man must overzealous be
Where a large leisure better frames the great.
Lastly, weigh this: The King's rage would
despatch

The last wretch of your hunted race to attend
His mightiest general's passing. Holofernes,
Your people's master, is their sole shield!

JUDITH

(stricken, running to MIRIAM).

His speech

Springs like the fountain of Jehovah's word,
Suffering no gainsay, yet the nerves of hope
It withers.

[Praying.

Canst Thou speak with poisoned tongue
And still be He Whose word came in the silence
Upon the hill?

[Breaks down.

MIRIAM

(throwing her arms about her).

Judith, my child!

BELTESHAZZAR

(with slow emphasis).

I await

Your answer ere another night has tasted
The cup of wrath poured by another day's
Delay.

[*Exit* BELTESHAZZAR.]

MIRIAM.

Judith, 'tis I. Be stanch! He's gone,
A hideous specter of the soul's twilight
That waits at the gate when the dazed sense
alone
From the house of darkness gropes toward a new
dawn.

Judith, arise! Thou didst not see the leer
That loosed the final barbed shaft when thou
Didst cast away thine armor. Thou'dst have
known
That pride of cunning is too light a vessel
To hold the word of Truth.

JUDITH.

Even wasting it,
He yet may utter it. For they that weave,

However basely, at their wilful plots
Still serve the larger pattern of God's will
While striving to undo it, ofttimes as aptly,
Albeit more blindly, than the humble ones
That read the pattern in the heart of faith.

MIRIAM.

In them that bear His word, wavering is death.

JUDITH.

Life 's grim to them that more than one intent
Perceiving, have to choose.

MIRIAM.

Thou, appointed one,
Charged with God's word, a precious vessel art,
And frail; in wilful choice swayed to and fro,
Thou'dst break!

JUDITH.

Alas! 'Tis not the choice that slays,
But blind necessity of choosing.

MIRIAM.

Daughter,
'Tis thou art blind from poring o'er thy path

Strewn with a specious sea of obstacles
 By trifler's craft. Uncharm thy gaze, lift it
 Again to the ultimate goal that to thy vision
 Rose from the silence of His word, and soon
 Thou'lt take the measure of a petty cheat
 By the stature of thy single faith.

JUDITH.

A cheat,

And petty, would more deadly victor be,
 Than he that, being born to rule, counts men
 The fingers of his strength, and holds them dear
 As they are strong and fit, not as they stood
 In conflict ranged.

MIRIAM.

'Tis 'fore sole Holofernes
 Thy brothers in defeat go down. Beware!
 Thou art bickering at God's word.

JUDITH

(in desperate defiance). .

If God would lay

Upon His creature such a deed, so monstrous,
 That it o'erscowls the blackest guilt of time;

So vile it leaves a bitter drop of shame
I' the cup of life for the last child of man;
If He would have me foul, beyond repair,
The inmost, holiest spring of being, with treason
That shall upon His very forehead cast
A shadow: Let Him send a sign that writes
For the last Age's cool unbending gaze
His single will, unfading, on those heavens,
His merciless countenance!

MIRIAM

(horror-stricken).

Woe! Woe upon thee,
Daughter of Juda! Abandoned of the Lord
Whom thou blasphemest! Down upon thy face,
Here, at thy fountain; cleanse thy soul and pray,
Till from thy head He take His curse! I go,
For I must leave thee with thy Lord. I'll keep
The tent, praying, till thou forgiveness find.
Alas! Alas! Brothers of Juda, woe
Has fall'n indeed! Woe! Woe!

[Exit MIRIAM.

JUDITH

(alone).

Alone! alone
More utterly than the last famished wretch

Cast out upon the desert, howling curses
At Him whose potent presence he avows
By very cursing! [Pause.

What a noisome wretch,
What shuffling, traitorous rogue am I! Here
fronts

My duty, rooted as those mountains, instant
As the parched anguish of my brothers, and I
Sidle toward any whim that plucks my sleeve!
Tutoring my conscience in a sick desire,
Mine action clogging with a wanton hope,
Behind a makeshift wall of obstacles
Skulking, I make believe I cannot win
Beyond mine own importunate wants. Jehovah!
Jehovah! Hear Thy daughter! Guide and
strengthen

My feet that in Thy sight again I walk.

VOICE OF KOZ

(*singing outside*).

I would not be the sun, I own,
For in his bed he sleeps alone.

JUDITH.

Soldiers at pranks beyond the lawful hour!—

This well and Holofernes' word will keep
Me safe.

[Kneels at the well, in prayer.]

VOICE OF KOZ

(coming nearer, continuing his song).

He walks upon a golden floor,

Overhead, over hill, over sea;

He teaches grass and trees to spring

The flowers their fragrance, birds to sing,

To man and maid their love and laughter,

And faith to meet what follows after.

But when the fellowed day is o'er

He seeks the lonely sea.

*[Enter KOZ, NOPHAH, and third
petty officer.]*

ALL THREE.

(singing).

I would not be the sun, I own,

For in his bed he sleeps alone.

NOPHAH.

Bold does it with women, by the burning
heart of Baal! 'Tis courage fetches them!

Koz.

Aye, skinsful of courage, rivers of it!

NOPHAH.

If I were . . .

Koz.

Holofernes . . .

NOPHAH.

I would not be alone to-night.

Koz

(*sings*).

I would not be the King, I own,
For in his bed he sleeps alone.

His steel-beaked words fly from his hall,
Overhead, over hill, over sea,

And where they go no fearless word,
No merry fellow's song is heard.

He seeks his brother's heart in vain
That harshly stills its gentle strain.

The Great King's love is proud and tall,
But love would humble be.

ALL THREE.

I would not be the King, I own,
For in his bed he sleeps alone.

KOZ.

But the King's loneliness is well lined and
padded.

NOPHAH.

(with a drunken swagger).

I would down her resistance!

KOZ.

And who could stand before a wagon load of
wine skins!

NOPHAH.

I'd approach her with confidence, thus; with
a dash of daredevil, thus!

KOZ.

Tempered with authority, thus?

NOPHAH.

Aye, with the authority of gallantry, thus!

KOZ.

Your next step, pray?

NOPHAH.

I'd lend gentleness to my bearing, thus; not unmixed with the severity and weight pertaining to my merits, thus.

[Loses his footing.]

KOZ.

Adding some lightness of mood for leverage, thus, eh?

NOPHAH.

Then I'd assure success by the beauty of my language. Poetry of speech is my strong point.

KOZ.

Aye, if you draw it from your experience!

NOPHAH.

I'd ply her with exquisite tones, nobility of metaphor, with witchery of rhythm and refinement of imagery.

Koz.

True. Look you use words as "swoon," "melt," "coo," "moon," "drowze," "yield"; monosyllables, that man first learned to form before he had teeth and bones, and was soft and wobbly like those transparent lumps you find melting on the seashore; words that mothers coo to their babes. Beware of speech articulate and potent with meaning, or hearted with force; let it be pale, well-bled, bleached to fit the uses of gentle breeding.

NOPHAH.

Nor of too direct intent.

Koz.

By no means! And when ideas fail and speech halts——

NOPHAH.

Then I shall grow subtle and symbolic!

Koz.

You are so now, my precious. And be sure you take your images from natural history, lest

you be accused of being unpoetic; and from the polite parts of it, lest you be thought brutal. If you'd express a man's passion, look upon the sweep of a butterfly; if you'd utter the duties of mankind, go ask the bee; if you'd hold up a mirror to life, seek instruction in the barnyard, and if you search for the mysteries of the human soul, let botany be your guide.

NOPHAH.

Aye, with such flowers shall my spirit sue her——

Koz.

Sewer? Stop! Your speech is strong, indeed!

NOPHAH.

I'd address her thus: "By the burning . . ."

Koz

(interrupting him, promptly).

We will sing.

(Sings.)

Nor the King's counselor be, I own,
For in his bed he sleeps alone.

He weaves his plots and casts them wide,
Overhead, over hill, over sea,
 To grapple faith with faithless skill,
 Or snare the unpersuaded will.
 But gray suspicion skulks abroad
 And treason loiters by the road.
By stratagems who would abide
Nor friend nor love hath he.

ALL THREE.

Nor the King's counselor be, I own,
For in his bed he sleeps alone.

NOPHAH.

I'd say: "By the burning . . ."

KOZ

(promptly).

I knew a woman more lonely than the Judean
woman that came yesterday.

THIRD OFFICER.

Who was that?

KOZ.

She slew her husband in his sleep. They had to sew her in a leather sack before the all-devouring sea would take her.

THIRD OFFICER.

Look, there! Isn't that the Judean beauty?

KOZ.

'Tis she. And this is her well. Nophah, this is your opportunity. Forward!

[Pushes him toward JUDITH.]

NOPHAH.

Don't you see, she is praying. 'T would be cruel. . . .

KOZ.

Poetic speech builds a ready bridge between God and man. Advance!

[Pushes him forward.]

NOPHAH.

Nay. She belongs to Holofernes. An honorable man would not poach in another's domain!

KOZ.

A derelict belongs to the salver. On!

[*Pushes him toward JUDITH.*

JUDITH.

What would you of me?

NOPHAH.

Oh! . . . Most gracious. . . . Farewell!

[*Tries to leave.*

KOZ

(*pushes him forward again*).

Go to! You will win her. . . . I see it
by the melting of her eyes.

NOPHAH.

I swoon to thee, to thee, to thee I swoon,
I melt, and coo with the love-melting moon
That melts in star dust. Melt, oh melt thou
soon,
Cooing love-atoms at me while I swoon. . . .

JUDITH

(*to Koz*).

Pray, take him off.

Koz

(to NOPHAH).

She's yielding; to it, man!

NOPHAH.

Oh, lady, melting underneath the moon. . . .

JUDITH.

Pray, leave me, I am hedged with death!

Koz

(to NOPHAH).

To it, man, ere Holofernes comes! . . .
My skin is itching as if it sensed a flaying.

NOPHAH.

Away! I would not poach . . .

Koz.

On, now! She's waiting, you've almost won her.

NOPHAH

(to JUDITH, moving off).

I'm pressed now. Good-night, and take a friend's warning; for that I came; don't trust the King's counselor! Good-night. Come,

boys, don't bother her. Haste. Let's sing.

[*Sings, moving off.*]

Nor Great God Baal I'd be, I own,

For in his bed he sleeps alone.

(*To Koz, speaking.*)

Now I've shown you! But wait till I see her
the next time! (*Calling back.*) Have courage,
little woman! Strong hearts beat for you and
friendly eyes are watching over your safety!

Koz

(*sings*).

He stretches forth his fiery main,

Overhead, over hill, over sea;

He smites the innocent and good

Together with the dragon brood;

He laughs when agony cries out,

And frowns when gladness leads the rout.

Men con his counsels all in vain,

For he must secret be.

ALL THREE.

I would not be Great Baal, I own,

For in his bed he sleeps alone.

[*Exeunt KOZ, NOPHAH, and third
petty officer.*]

JUDITH

JUDITH

(alone).

Is there no way; no way of peace? Great one,
Art thou not greater than thine oath? Flout it,
Give me my brothers' lives, and I will pay thee
With all, my life, my love, my every care.

Is not my living body more to thee
Than those few thousand famished dead?

[Seeing HOLOFERNES approaching.

'Tis he!

I must . . . Where shall I go? . . . God
of my Fathers! . . .

[Enter HOLOFERNES rapidly.

HOLOFERNES

(intercepting her).

Judith! . . .

Judith, beloved! . . . No, you shall not
Again avoid me! Stand!

[She stands at gaze, in desperation.

Thou art terrible,

A bannered army glittering in the sun,
Yea, glorious is thy face amid thine hair,
As a great army marching from the woods
Upon a sunlit slope. Thy brow 's a banner

For Kings to vanquish by, thy dusky crown
Outlusters all the diadems of earth,
Thine eyes are watchfires for embattled heroes
To gather round and ancient tales retell
Of deeds that dwarf their hot ambition's pro-
jects

To children's fretful need of toys. . . . But
now

They are desperate as if they were to brave
A thing that sets the common laws of nature
At naught.

JUDITH.

No, no! 'Tis peace of solitude
I need.

HOLOFERNES.

And I, a certain answer!

JUDITH.

You know

My . . . words.

HOLOFERNES.

I know this: All your words speak fair,
Yet that's not it; but there's an inner voice,

My heart, like a caged leopard at the bars,
Paces its weary round of listless matters.
For what's not thou, is but an obstacle
'Twixt thee and me.

JUDITH.

Pray, cease . . .

HOLOFERNES.

And when thou art near
All matters, mean and lofty, cast distinctions,
On tip-toe pressing round the circle lit
By thee, hallowing thee with thy mirrored glory.
A kingdom 's less than the happy wisps of hair
Lackeying the changes of thy breath; nor more
Than grasses in thy path that rise, sighing
Thee back.

JUDITH.

Forbear! Those words are not for such
As I.

HOLOFERNES.

Thou'dst have me cold, Judith, beloved,
When the very breezes that would cool thy
cheeks

Glow with thy touch and change to burning
kisses?

When even the stars melt on thy dusky tresses
Thou'dst fix me apart?

JUDITH.

Pray, 'tis not I, not I . . .
Thou great one, pray, believe me, 'tis not I . . .
My will's not mine, nor mine my speech, not
mine,
But His that sent me hither.

HOLOFERNES

(misunderstanding her).

Ah, beloved,
It is the prophetess beats down the woman
That has no weapon but a supplicating
Mute brow. I'll be the woman's second; joined
We'll soon prevail.

[Approaches her.]

JUDITH

(terrified).

No! . . . No! . . . Pray,
grant surcease. . . .
My portion lies so far from human lot,

So monstrously, so hideously apart,
That not one human feeling, common impulse,
Or mutual motive points the way.

HOLOFERNES.

Forsake
Thy task. No power may speak unto our will
Unless the loyal heart his voucher be.

JUDITH

(absorbed).

A loyal heart, an undivided heart. . . .

HOLOFERNES.

My sword's impatient to redeem thy pledge.
'Tis wont to trust its edge alone. Instead
Of prophetess to be a slayer's guide,
The woman, uncognizant of bloody deeds
She could not stay, shall be the victor's goal
Where hardness melts from him as April
streams
From mountain's rigor, sun-caressed.

JUDITH

(fiercely).

I will
No woman be! I am the prophetess

Sent by Jehovah. And I am to thee
 Naught but Jehovah's messenger. Make way.
 I will be undisturbed.

HOLOFERNES.

Too late thou wouldst set
 The bar. Passion at each recurrent wave
 Pushes its mark beyond the last until
 The final tide will bear away all will,
 All purpose, every guarding obstacle
 To strew them, in tumultuous, godlike mirth,
 Abandoned wreckage, o'er the past. Many
 A wave has mounted, since like love's storm
 cloud
 Thy face I first beheld. Time 's at full tide.
 I must have thee.

[Moves toward her.]

JUDITH

(fiercely).

Be thanked. Thou hast waked again
 The prophetess lulled by the woman!

HOLOFERNES.

Judith,

Fear no dishonor! Thou shalt sit, my wife,

In the King's home, and the Great King shall
 envy
His servant.

JUDITH.

Wife! . . .

HOLOFERNES.

And thou shalt bear me children,
Sons, great-limbed, mighty, that shall rule the
 world
In truth and honor; and daughters like to thee,
To be the mothers, in heroic faith,
Of a new race of men. . . .

JUDITH

(interrupting him).

Stay! . . . I will not
Hear thee!

HOLOFERNES.

I'll make thee queen of thine own country
To rule, in thine own faith, thy brothers——

JUDITH.

That thou
Must slay!

HOLOFERNES.

That I with thee would prosper. Hark!
 The King demands allegiance; that assured,
 His hand is gentle, having found contentment
 A willing tributary.

JUDITH

(praying).

God, O my God!
 Hear me. Unseal mine eye that I may see
 My way before me.

(To HOLOFERNES.)

If I gave thee triumph
 Over my brothers wouldst thou spare. . . .

HOLOFERNES.

The offenders
 Against thy God?

JUDITH.

If I beseeched thee? . . .

HOLOFERNES.

Thou?
 Thy God's avenging minister?

JUDITH

(at his feet).

Upon

My knees; here, in the dust, kissing thy feet,
Praying: Give me their lives?

HOLOFERNES

(gladly).

I cherish thee

More for that prayer, sweetly forsworn, be-
loved,

Than for thy nigh inhuman strength of faith.
The heart is strongest when it seems most weak
With very need of loving.

JUDITH.

Give them me.

I will love thee, know naught beside thy love;
Thy wife I will be, will thy children bear;
I will forsake my God to follow thee
To the last bourne of being—by thy love,
Give me their lives!

HOLOFERNES.

All that the battle spares

I give thee, all but——

JUDITH

JUDITH.

All——

HOLOFERNES.

But those Bethulians
I've sworn to slay. I have no choice. My oath
Is known to the army, to the Great King's self,
And by him back returned, his absolute
Command.

JUDITH

(stricken).

Ah! . . . No! . . .

[Rising in desperation.

I must have those, . . . I will, . . . I
will. . . .

*[Clutching him, kissing him des-
perately.*

What are
Their famished bodies to my youth? Their
lips,
With anguish cracked, to these that rain the
showers
Of love on thee? Take me. I'll pay thee fair
An hundredfold. . . .

HOLOFERNES

(chilled).

Thou payest me witch gold.
Seeking and spurning me on the selfsame impulse
With fleeting feet, thy kisses haste toward them
That call them forth, my foes.

JUDITH.

Thou 'rt great among men
Because thy purpose with a single aim
Looks toward Life's greatness as the final goal
And measure of life. Love now comes suppliant,
Life's source and primal impulse; wouldst thou
take her
And yet deny her plea?

HOLOFERNES

(freeing himself).

If thou couldst turn
From minister of thy God's deadly wrath
But now, to frenzied ransomer, who knows

But thou wilt find as smooth the way from lover
To enemy?

[*A commotion outside. Enter
BAGOAS and an Assyrian officer
with some soldiers, leading cap-
tive EKRON, disguised to re-
semble an Assyrian soldier.*

JUDITH

(*startled*).

Ekron, son of Joseph!

[*EKRON ignores her presence.*

BAGOAS.

A spy
Caught prowling near your tent. I brought him
hither

That you could question him before the camp
Might be aroused. He's from Bethulia,
One of her brothers, I suppose.

[*Indicating JUDITH.*

HOLOFERNES

(*to EKRON*).

Whence art thou?
Approach,
[*No answer.*

OFFICER.

Great General, he has refused
Steadfastly every answer.

HOLOFERNES.

Dost thou know
The penalty of spying?

[*No answer.*(*To officer.*)

Take him off.

OFFICER.

Yes,

My general.

[*As they are passing out, JUDITH,
who has stood baffled, takes a
step toward HOLOFERNES.*

JUDITH

(*imploringly*).

Stay! . . . Hear me!

[*As HOLOFERNES turns toward
JUDITH, EKRON suddenly
flings off the guards. Drawing
a dagger, he dashes toward*

JUDITH

HOLOFERNES. JUDITH, *with a spontaneous impulse, screams, addressing* HOLOFERNES.

Thy sword! . . . Ah!
[HOLOFERNES *wheeling, draws his sword, piercing* EKRON.

EKRON

(*having fallen, raises himself; pointing at*
JUDITH, *with deadly hatred*).

Harlot!

[*Dies.*

[JUDITH *staggers back. Exeunt*
BAGOAS *and soldiers with body.*

HOLOFERNES

(*with fire, to* JUDITH).

Judith, beloved! Thy heart has given
A certain answer. Up, prepare thyself.
Our nuptials are to-morrow night. I've much
To order now that from our bridal bed
Rising, the following dawn, I may go forth
To win thy queendom for a morning gift.
Time 's orbing forth a greater age with thee
At the creative core. Judith!

[*He embraces her passionately.*

To-morrow

Night in my tent. Good-night, beloved!

[As he leaves.

Queen

Of all Judea!

[Exit HOLOFERNES.

JUDITH.

O Treason! Treason,

Thine own rebellious swelling heart that thou
Wouldst spew from thee chokes up thy throat!

O Truth,

Give me thy high deliverance of avowal.

I must speak.

(Calling.)

Holofernes! . . .

(Screaming).

Holofernes! . . .

Burst, heart! . . . It strangles me. . . .

I must speak. . . . Must . . .

Speak . . . Truth. . . .

[Falls senseless.

(CURTAIN)

ACT IV



Act IV

THE following night.

A room in Holofernes' tent. A door at the right, leading into another room; outer door at the back. Cheering without, gradually diminishing.

[Enter from without, HOLOFERNES and BELTESHAZZAR.]

HOLOFERNES.

My soldiers! Ah, I knew them. How they cheered!

BELTESHAZZAR.

Your will to them is like the morning breeze
To the herded clouds.

HOLOFERNES.

They'll browse those hill-tops clean
To-morrow!

BELTESHAZZAR.

Thou art mightier, Holofernes,
Than kings.

HOLOFERNES.

Such praise from other men were idle;
From thee it reads: too dangerous to live.

BELTESHAZZAR.

It reads: too necessary not to live.

HOLOFERNES.

Come! Come! Thou 'rt darkling grown now
that thy thoughts
Uncovered stand i' the sun.

BELTESHAZZAR.

I know thy generals:
Weak staves unbraced will part, that, hooped in
iron,
Take iron strength. The King needs thee and
while
His giving passes thy sword's reach of conquest
His favor smiles on thee.

BAGOAS

(singing within, accompanying his song with hammer strokes upon HOLOFERNES' sword, which he is retempering).

The sword is master of them all,
King and lover and lady tall,
Toiler trooper and general—
The sword, high-ho,
High ring-a ding-a do,
Is master of them all.

HOLOFERNES

(smiling).

'Tis good Bagoas
Edging my sword and his chipped patience so
To mince away the night—
Before my tent, then,
At dawn!

BELTESHAZZAR.

I shall not lag—
Thou fortunate
Of men to have found upon the very thresh-
hold
The fairest queen to lead thee to thy kingdom!
[Exit BELTESHAZZAR.]

HOLOFERNES.

'Tis time she came. Judith, "the fairest queen!"

Even Belteshazzar's stark and frosted fancy
Bows creaking to thy beauty though his craft
Will never take the measure of thy worth!

BAGOAS

(within, as before).

What men have wove, men may divide,
But when the Fates the knot have tied
Then must the merry sword decide—

The sword, high-ho,
High ring-a ding-a do,
The merry sword decide.

HOLOFERNES

(restlessly).

What could detain her?—Cool now! Passion
snatches

Yet less craves overpunctual hot-foot zeal
Than the infixed restraint that like our bony
frame

Its burden of soft flesh, steadies desire,
Too prone to base surrender. Yet, I vow,
If she came racing like the steeds of morn

I'd choke the thought whose look of love she
lacked.—

Patience! There's much to order for the at-
tack.

Left wing . . . hm! Modesty when love's at
tide,

Like ice bar in a river at spring flood,
Nurses a raging demon where she found
A laughing, urgent god.—The van must gain
The second ridge to wedge their outer posts
Apart.—Love's single thought is like a bee
That buzzes blindly at one prisoning pane,
With every other wide.—But thus delay,
Time's caterpillar, eats, unceasing eats,
With unrequiting jaw the richest boughs
Of opportunity. I must. . . .

BAGOAS

(within, as before).

When faith and honor and truth have passed
And craft in his tangled web is fast
The day 's for the merry sword at last—
The sword, high-ho,
High ring-a ding-a do,
The merry sword at last.

JUDITH

HOLOFERNES

(calling).

Bagoas!

BAGOAS

(gayly).

Coming, my general!

HOLOFERNES.

Time 's to him also

A balky nag.

*[Enter BAGOAS, with HOLOFERNES' sword.]*Thou look'st as thou wouldst slay
The very night for meddling.

BAGOAS.

So I would

But for you, my great master.

HOLOFERNES.

How so, me?

BAGOAS.

Because you'd summon all the world's magicians,
Surgeons and sorcerers, all the conjuring tribe,
To make her whole again and live forever.

HOLOFERNES.

Whereby thou'dst never see the battle dawn!
Know'st thou the army's temper; will they fight
As in the forenoon of this war?

BAGOAS

(raising the sword).

Their temper
 Is hard and true as Holofernes' blade!
 I've seen them sharpening their swords, and
 mending
 Their armors; mostly sharpening, for none
 Dreams of defense. 'Tis slaying, slaying!
 Mad
 With battle lust they are. Ha! You will lead
 A hungry herd to a none too ample pasture.

HOLOFERNES.

Yes, thus I'll see my lambs! For sharpest war
Is shortest o'er.

BAGOAS.

They roam the camp in bands,
Boasting each other down, singing old ballads

That with their swords have rusty lain these
months,
Swearing they'll play at leap-frog with those
hills,
Holding mock auctions of their booty, bidding
In Judean gold; and from their words 't would
seem
Your army 's doubled by so many women
As fair and beautiful as—, widowed all
And orphaned, shrieking in their arms.

HOLOFERNES.

'Tis odd

That greed and lust and wild joy of the game
Should crack a sharper whip about the ears
Of action than most virtuous sober need.

[*Absorbed.*

What could have kept her? Has this savage
mirth
Pierced her seclusion?

BAGOAS.

May I speak a warning,
My gentle master?

HOLOFERNES.

Out with it.

BAGOAS.

There's matter

In the army's spirit that would chafe blood-sore
Your lady's loyal sense, already bruised
Between two countering master-powers. Set
guards

Upon her hearing all night, and to-morrow
On every farthest avenue of sense,
Lest the earlier sway, each native impulse swell-
ing,

Return, and, like a mightier wave that swallows
A less at strife against it, waxing double
On what erst sapped it, her love and faith in you,
Sweep her beyond your reach.

HOLOFERNES.

Ah! She is not

Of those that make their lovers' tongues their
eyes,

Their lords' discretion their sole conscience!

BAGOAS.

Yet.

Being woman, she will hold the present pain
And creature-need to her compassionate vision
So close 't will shut away all earth, all sky,
And every dearest image of her soul.

HOLOFERNES.

Not shut them out, but on their empty brows
Trace a transparent image of a new
And richer truth transfigured in the glow
Of her compassion.—Some there are, thrust
forth

To all the battering rage of Life's offense
And backward suck and sapping undertow
Of Life's discomfiture and heartbreak, yet,
Bold-jutting human capes, they raise aloft,
Unshaken to the last, one beacon-purpose,
A lesser brother to the eternal stars:
The light of man's resolve. 'Tis they that know
The patience, nerved with all-sufficient strength,
The tragic ruin no God can repair,
The pity that will make a pact with death;
And they alone may see the heavens open
When the tumultuous glowering wrack of being
Round one celestial spring of light is ranged
In God-informed communion.

BAGOAS.

My dear master!
Thus would thine empire speak if the common
heart
E'er rose to the common tongue!

HOLOFERNES

(ignoring the interruption).

The bitterness
Of base default and traitorous division
They taste with oft unvisioned, baffled sense;
Yet in their inmost being, like a star
Constant beyond the tempest-riven clouds
Integrity dwells, calm, unhesitant,
By the plain test of his own substance judging
Each issue, though the outer sense, distraught,
In panic rave; welding a thousand bents,
A thousand wanton countering rebel wills
And slack abandonments into the true,
The primal purpose, ultimate spring of action.
They choose the way they must, and having
started
Cannot halt half way with the rest that snatch a
maimed,
Stunted success from partial failure. Winning,
They rise beyond the estate of the common
earth;
Failing, like fallen angels, plunge straightway
To the lowest pit of ruin absolute,
Passing all middle worlds that offer faint
And mongrel maintenance.—Such is she, so true,

Each part so loyal to the loyal whole,
That each would deem it treason to give heed
By so much as a breath to any pang
Save of achievement.

BAGOAS.

She that justly wears
The crown of such praise, and from lips like
those,
Must be a queen indeed.

HOLOFERNES.

'Tis such know truly
Fate. For integrity 's the inner substance
Of fate, the outer is resolve.—

Bagoas,
Haste, find her. Guard her safe from all an-
noyance
Or painful witness.

BAGOAS.

I will.

[*Exit BAGOAS, leaving sword.*]

HOLOFERNES.

(taking up the sword).

Thou 'rt keen, my blade,
And every stroke on the enemy will send
Its double through her heart!—Enough! This
night
Be wholly dedicate to love.

[Putting sword away, humming.

Thy mouth 's a spring of roses
As the honey mouth of June;
Thy throat, a bower of nightingales,
And all the world, a tune.

[Speaking.

Why tarriest,
Beloved? Behold, the night would rise and
chant
A song of passion.

[Humming.

And all the world is singing,
And time is e'er at June;
God's smile is beaming on thy head,
His grace is in the tune.

[Enter BAGOAS, hurriedly.

Thou 'rt back soon.

BAGOAS.

The harm

Is done.

HOLOFERNES.

What say'st thou? Quick!

BAGOAS.

She's coming hither,
By the camp's brag and her poor echoing tongue
Lashed into madness.

HOLOFERNES.

Hush!

BAGOAS.

'Tis she!

[*Exit* BAGOAS, *taking* HOLO-
FERNES' sword.

[*Enter* JUDITH, *followed by*
MIRIAM.

JUDITH.

Blood! Blood!
The plains are drowned in blood, the hills are
drunken

With blood! The streams are choked with
bodies. Ah!

Thy hands are red. Wash them! I must not
see them,

They've slain my brothers. And thy mouth,
how red!

Go, wipe it clean, I must not kiss it thus,
'T has drunk the blood of children. Away!
Have pity!

If thou touch me their blood will be on me,
And naught will wash it off. Spare me! Alas!
Alas!

HOLOFERNES.

Judith, beloved! Calm thyself!
Pray, heed not soldiers' giddy boasts.

JUDITH

(avoiding him).

Bodies,
Bodies; children and men.—Where are my
sisters?

I do not see them. "Ah! To-night thou 'lt be
The only woman; make the most of it.
To-morrow every man will have his prize,
Each of thy sisters a new master."

HOLOFERNES.

Judith,

Let things unalterably past recall
Rest past the idle wish to call them back.
Let not thy reason lag behind thy office.
Thou 'rt queen and thy domain shall bounded
be
By thy sole scope and tendency of blessing.
Come to my heart that thine own, feeding there
On the abundance of my love, be soon
Restored.

JUDITH

(screaming, running from him).

Thy head! Thou hast no head! Ah!

[Screaming and cowering away.]

HOLOFERNES

*(with determination, raising her and holding
her close).*

Since

'Twixt the division of thy heart thy reason
Would play the traitor I will heal the schism
By filling all thy being with this new love
That by complete unquestioned occupation

It drive all other tenants out. Judith,
Beloved of my soul, let this one night,
Calm like the whirlwind's core amid the fury
Encircling it, be wholly consecrate
To love. I love thee, Judith. Dost thou hear?
I love thee!

JUDITH.

I love thee! Say it again,
Again, and yet again. Let thine: "I love thee"
Press one upon another till they overwhelm me
By very iteration. Let them come, waves
On drowning lips; a frenzied multitude
Roaring down adverse speech.

HOLOFERNES.

Not thus, beloved;
Not like a greater fury driving out
A less, but like an April shower that melts
By soft beguilement winter's desperate rigor.

JUDITH.

Ah! I am willing. Say 't again, repeat it,
So that thou fill'st me, that there's not one
thought,

One motion, impulse, wish, or utterance,
Not wholly thine. Make me thy grove of
spring,
Thy ringing bower of passion, lest I turn
A sepulcher.

HOLOFERNES.

Is this a mock of madness,
Or passion, like a steadfast craft, breaking
From ruin's smothering coils?

JUDITH.

Repeat it o'er
And o'er: "I love thee." Love is not a vessel,
Emptied by spending, and by saving filled.
The heart grows great with each new lavished
ardor.
Did ever spring, flower-surfeited, cry out:
"Enough!" Or Heaven count his stars? Say
it:
"I love thee."

HOLOFERNES.

Judith, I love thee.

JUDITH.

This night

Shall be ours wholly. We will stand upon it,
We two, alone, as on the top of time
Whence past and future drop away, each side,
To sheer oblivion. I'll know naught but thee.
I'll cling to thee for thus I'll think I stand,
Though plunging down the abyss. I'll broach
 my bosom
With these, my hands, casting forth all it holds,
That all its woman depth shall open lie
Unto thy filling.

HOLOFERNES.

Thus I'd have my queen,
With heart so great that only a storm that
 racks
The universe, shall stir its depths. Judith,
Beloved, I adore thee.

JUDITH.

I will thrust

Away the holiest for thee, for what were
A faith that did not grapple thee to me.—
Oh! God! My soul is torn like beggars' rags

And through the rents looks all the poor mad
truth.

Thine, Holofernes; I will be thine own

This night—forever. . . .

HOLOFERNES.

Thus 't shall be, forever. . . .

[*They embrace.*

Judith! . . .

JUDITH

(*startled*).

What wouldst thou?

HOLOFERNES.

Guess!

[*Moving toward inner door.*

JUDITH

(*clutching him, in terror*).

Do not leave me,

Not now!

HOLOFERNES.

Leave thee now? Stay!

[*Calling.*

Bagoas!

BAGOAS

(within).

Aye.

[*Enter* BAGOAS.]

HOLOFERNES.

Bring in the stuffs and jewels.

BAGOAS.

I will.

[*Exit* BAGOAS.]

HOLOFERNES.

Treasures,

From many royal houses culled, await
The crowning of thy choice.

*[Reënter, several times, BAGOAS
with precious stuffs, which he
piles on the floor.]*

HOLOFERNES

*(taking up an embroidered rose-colored garment,
putting it on her shoulder).*

Color of rose,

Behold it flaming with a finer glow
Stolen from thy cheeks that it would tax with
coldness.

JUDITH.

Too gentle for the fires it were to match.

HOLOFERNES

(trying another).

Nay, then, this spangled purple whence thy
neck

Rises like fairy column of a birch
Out of the velvet dusk.

JUDITH.

No, no! Such stuffs,
The sumptuous trappings of a full content,
Would mock the occasion.

HOLOFERNES.

Take this yellow, then.
'T will, like the grain with summer's honey
breath,
Wave with thine every motion.

JUDITH.

No, nor that.
Gold 's for the harvest time when the long urge
Of life is spent.

HOLOFERNES.

Here's soft white silk that melts
In silver ripples to thy flow of graces,
And lawn like driven snow on pale rose
petals . . .

Ah! for the eyes that fixed, hands that could
grasp,

A heart that harbored, past the chance of time:
The swift young Graces, alert in the quick-
ened eyes that confess us,
Graces that circle the brow and the dusky
dome of the head,
Tell each tender design and foreknowledge
of hands that caress us,
Leap from the melting of lines where the
flow of motion sped——

JUDITH.

Speak in each cadence, each tremor of
tones, that seek and possess us,
Fly to the dawning of words and divine
what no words ever said,
Read from the wordless lips the treasured
speeches that bless us,
Tremble in fires of passion that leap our
passion to wed.—

HOLOFERNES.

Judith! beloved!

JUDITH.

(in his arms).

Gather me to thee,
Crush me to thee till like those Tyrian shells
I yield my being to thee, arraying thee
Wholly in my love as in a crimson garb
Inalienable.

*[Reënter BAGOAS with many
jewels, which he lays at her
feet; exit again.]*

HOLOFERNES.

Look! the sun's own mines
Are looted, and the stores of all his rays
Yield thee their pride.

*[Trying several jewels against her
hair and throat.]*

Ah me! These rubies cast
A threadbare glamor on thy tresses' velvet.
The rose that dawns through thine ear's chiseled
cream
Puts out these opals' glowing cores; these pearls

But cloud the softer luster of thy throat.

Away!

[Throwing them on the ground.

Mine eyes, and hands, and every sense
Are cheated of their rightful privilege,
Trifling with shadows when the light has come.

JUDITH

*(taking up an ornament of five strings of silver
beads clasped together at the ends, fitting
them in her hair; absorbed, humming).*

Complained the dewy grasses:

“Our jewels fade away
Before the morning passes,
And never see the day.”

[Speaking.

Does 't please my lord?

HOLOFERNES.

Thou'dst turn a twist of straw
Into a crown of gold.

JUDITH

(continuing to hum).

She clasped in her dusky tresses
Five strings of silver beads;

And the dewy droop of grasses
No dawn-renewal needs.

[*Reënter* BAGOAS.

HOLOFERNES.

Ah! Where's the art
Can seize a charm the very music mocks
That spends its soul upon 't.

BAGOAS

(*to* HOLOFERNES).

My gentle master. . . .

HOLOFERNES.

What now?

BAGOAS.

Important news.

HOLOFERNES.

There's naught important
Except that I be quit of any news
Until to-morrow's dawn. You guard my peace!

BAGOAS.

May I speak one last word?

HOLOFERNES.

Speak.

BAGOAS.

Scouting parties,

Several, report, agreeing in the substance,

Concerted movements pointing to attack

In every fortress on the hills!

HOLOFERNES.

I hope

'Tis true. I like a willing enemy

That saves me half the way. A coward foe

Steals half my will by sick contagion.

BAGOAS.

Pray,

The generals wait you in the council room.

HOLOFERNES.

I'll see them.

[He turns to go; exit BAGOAS.]

JUDITH

(in desperate terror).

Do not leave me. Pray! No! No!

I cannot let thee go, I cling to thee. . . .

Not now! . . .

HOLOFERNES.

I shall return, ere thou canst count
Those jewels at thy feet.

JUDITH.

I beg thee, stay;
I cannot be without thee now. I'm weak,
Desperately weak. The dread of solitude
Upon me bends the frozen front of death.

HOLOFERNES

(smiling).

A woman's heart is ever woman's yoke,
E'en thine, great queen!

JUDITH

(flinging herself upon him, screaming).

Thou must! Thou shalt! I have
That to tell thee. . . .

HOLOFERNES

(soothingly).

Which thou shalt have all night
To say.

[Firmly, freeing himself.]

Array thyself! When I return
'T will be a bridegroom coming to his bride.
[*Exit* HOLOFERNES.

JUDITH

(falls to the floor, breaking into hysterical laughter).

He grants me all that he would have me ask!
Ha, ha! Ha! ha! ha! . . .

MIRIAM

(furiously).

Traitor! Didst hear the news? 'Tis the fifth
day!
Thy brothers know thou hast failed them. They
will come
To bury thee beneath their bodies.

JUDITH.

God!

God of my Fathers, make them offer battle
Now, at this hour!

MIRIAM.

That none be left but me
Thy crime to witness!

JUDITH.

God, this I demand:
This night shall be mine own. I'll pour into it
For him and for myself the sum of all love,
That he and I shall say: Our life attained
Its fullness. Let the rest, an empty vessel,
Be dashed upon the rocks of ruin.

MIRIAM.

Fool!

Blasphemous fool! His death being God's de-
cree

'T were infamy to join thine unto his;
Else nor thy life, nor a thousand thousand such
Were a fit price for such a deed. Life's worth
Is not in barter nor in numbered price,
But in its power and bent of service.

JUDITH.

Listen!

Hast never heard of lovers' bodies found
Locked in each other's arms, smiling in death?

MIRIAM.

Thou 'rt mad! Judith!

JUDITH.

There are things, 't were more sane
Should crack our reason.

MIRIAM.

Better so than foul
Thine honor.

JUDITH.

Holofernes, thou art great,
Greater than any I have known. Thou seest
I cannot live, nor can I die alone.
Have I no right to make thee lead the way
Into the dark?

[With a scream.]

No, no! God of my Fathers,
No, save me from this thing, more heinous far
Than brother slaying his first brother. God!
Even Thou wilt bear to all eternity
Branded upon Thy brow the shame of it
Till all hell's fiends with grins of base con-
nivance
Sly fingers point at Thee. . . . I'll tell him all.
Thus will I speak: . . .

HOLOFERNES

(within).

Are all my arms prepared?

BAGOAS

(within).

They're in their wonted place. Your sword is
hung
Above your couch.

HOLOFERNES.

Its temper tested?

BAGOAS.

Aye!

'T would cut a tuft of wool a sluggard stream
Carried against it.

HOLOFERNES.

If reports are true

'T will have sharp work to-morrow.

BAGOAS.

'T will bite into it

As 't were a peach.

[Humming.]

The sword, high-ho,
High ring-a ding-a do,
The merry sword at last.

[JUDITH *during this conversation
has gradually risen as if drawn
up by an external force. She
stands erect, her arms rigidly
extended above her head.*

MIRIAM

(in a visionary manner).

Jehovah! Jehovah! Draw Thou her to Thy
purpose!
Hold Thou her thus!

[*Enter* HOLOFERNES.

HOLOFERNES

(stopping inside the door).

Judith!

MIRIAM.

Thy bride 's prepared.

HOLOFERNES.

Judith!

[*Rushes toward her, seizes and carries her, who remains rigid, within.*

MIRIAM

*(rushing toward the closed door, falling upon
her face).*

My child, my child!

[She bursts into violent weeping.

(CURTAIN).

ACT V

Act V

O *PEN place in front of Holofernes' tent,
as in Act II. Early dawn, gradually
brightening.*

*[Enter JUDITH, from HOLO-
FERNES' tent.]*

JUDITH.

'Tis done. . . . Done? . . . Suddenly I
struck. . . . Swiftly—

Can such a thing be swiftly done? Is 't but
A sword edge from such fires of might to stark
And ashen ruin? No! . . . No! . . .
't would take

Slow months and years of devil's tutoring
To scale such horror. . . . Done? Does my
hand say so?

'Tis white and soft. Was ever devil's claw
So soft and white? Or do my eyes confirm it
And yet not turn to stone? Were 't done, by
me done,

The night, gaping apart with jagged flash,
Had set me forth amid a sudden blaze
To the execration of a universe
Aghast; then like a brazen gate, crashed shut
Crushing me to extinction absolute.
Instead, here 's dawn, growing, an innocent child,
Gently upon the bosom of heavenly light.

[Enter MIRIAM.]

MIRIAM.

The camp is wakening. Haste. Thou hast not
done
Until thy fiery signal calls thy brothers
To the opportune attack.

JUDITH.

The fire signal! . . .
Nay, 'tis not done till I give the dumb deed
A tongue that curses whom it bids rejoice.
Ay! . . . God! . . . I have not done 't!
No! No! I will not
Have done 't! Beneath the footstool of God's
strength
I'll hide the thought that such thing could be
done.—

But when the flame has spoken then I'll call
It forth and bare my bosom to 't that it
Leap straight, a venom'd javelin, at life's
core. . . .

'Tis waking, waking . . . swelling. . . . (*Point-
ing to her bosom.*) Here! Ay! . . . Haste
Ere it burst.

MIRIAM.

Away!

[*Exeunt JUDITH and MIRIAM.*

[*Bugles and sounds of the camp's
awakening.*

[*Enter Persian and Mede officers.*

FIRST PERSIAN.

Curse the luck! This empire
As leaky as a basket with dissension
But now, patched by that master hand in one
Swift move, and we, tight at the very bottom
Beneath an avalanche of loyalty!
O! Luck, sole constant in disfavor!

FIRST MEDE.

Luck?

Luck 's the exacting pet of a large prudence

Reared on an ample marge of fallow chance,
Hating the miser that would pare his scope
Till nothing but one starved main chance endure,
Spurning the spendthrift who, his substance
wasted,
Would famished beg the leavings of her feast.
Think you, she'd heed us who were spendthrifts
both
And misers, lords, and conquered slaves?

FIRST PERSIAN.

A chance
Is left. We have the farthest wing. If once
The Assyrians waver we could turn the tide
And win our country's freedom.

FIRST MEDE.

In his hand,
We all, even you and I, will welded be
Into one willing bolt of victory.

*[Enter Assyrian officers, followed
by allied officers.]*

FIRST MEDE.

Good morning, comrades.

ASSYRIANS.

So to you.

OTHERS.

Good morning.

FIRST ASSYRIAN.

I hope to-morrow we shall spare the sun
The pain to climb those hills to bid us greeting.

SECOND ASSYRIAN.

I wish we'd start at once to save him now
What's left to-day.

FIRST PERSIAN.

A fire, look!

OTHERS.

Where?

FIRST ASSYRIAN.

Must be

A camp fire.

OTHERS.

Yes.

FIRST PERSIAN.

No! See it blazing up.

FIRST MEDE.

It is too lean and high to be a camp fire,
And past the line of tents.

FIRST PERSIAN

If 't could be so,
I'd say it was a signal fire.

FIRST ASSYRIAN

(to adjutant).

Have it
Extinguished. If the enemy 's alert
He'll read from that as from a book. Haste!
[Exit adjutant.]

SECOND ASSYRIAN.

Odd!

I seem to see a like flame. . . .

FIRST ASSYRIAN.

On the mountain. . . .

FIRST MEDE.

Yes, in Bethulia.

OTHERS.

'Tis mounting straight.

OTHERS.

And there . . . and there . . . there . . .
every mountain top
Wears a thin tuft of flame.

FIRST MEDE.

'Tis running faster
Than some high word from lip to eager lip.

FIRST ASSYRIAN.

Something is foul in this.

[*Enter* BAGOAS.

Where's Holofernes?

[*Enter orderly.*

ORDERLY

(*to* FIRST ASSYRIAN).

With that first flash of flame, as by it forced,
Bethulia's gate with simultaneous burst

Gave way, spewing down yonder dark defiles
A headlong clashing freshet of bright steel.
They'll be upon our outer posts ere we
Can reinforcements haste across the plain.
Our wing needs strengthening.

FIRST ASSYRIAN.

Holofernes! . . .

Bagoas!

BAGOAS.

Aye.

[Enter another orderly.]

ANOTHER ORDERLY.

The second and third mountains
Are trembling with eruptions of armed men.
Left center asks support.

FIRST ASSYRIAN.

Bagoas, call

Your master.

BAGOAS.

Even now I hesitate;
His last word was to await his summons.

[Enter third orderly.]

THIRD ORDERLY.

The fire signs leap from crest to crest as if
A giant hand skipped jewels on a vast
Dim sea, and ever where they touch they strike
The clash of rushing armed men from the
silence.

The center's van requests support.

FIRST ASSYRIAN
(to BAGOAS).

At once,

Call Holofernes!

BAGOAS.

I will.

[*Exit BAGOAS into HOLOFERNES'*
tent.

FIRST ASSYRIAN
(to adjutant).

Haste; the alarm

Throughout the camp!

ADJUTANT.

At once.

[*Exit adjutant.*

FIRST PERSIAN

(to FIRST MEDE).

Time 's slipped her halter
And having thrown all others challenges
A master.

FIRST MEDE.

Aye, and proving him divulges
His stature no more bent by common labors
To jealous common level. When an age
Runs even he grows fat whose seeking slants
E'er toward the lower verge o' the common
pasture.

But when a new age rears a harsh divide
By the sheer urge of her creative youth
Against a past grown sleek and stale, then he
That stoutly toward the height can set his foot
Shall win the young slopes of the future.

FIRST PERSIAN

(*ironically*).

Thus

In his turn verging down.

FIRST MEDE

(*ignoring his words*).

But one must lead,
One greater than the rest. 'Tis Holofernes
Who, as the sun topping those hills. . . .

[*Reënter* BAGOAS.

BAGOAS.

Horror!

Horror! . . . Horror! . . .

GENERALS.

What is the matter?

BAGOAS.

Woe!

The pillar of our trust is shattered, stopped
The river of our strength. O! my dear master!
Woe! Woe! Murder has entered the great
heart,

That to an empire lent the beat of life
And quiet pulse of comfort to its millions.

SEVERAL.

Murder?

FIRST ASSYRIAN.

What sayst thou, murder?

BAGOAS.

If tongue could name,
Voice fitly utter it, 't would blast your hearing.
Go, see what will your vision brand: a head
Whose loyal counsel ever wooed his heart;
A heart that ever whispered to the head
Warm care for you, estranged in deadly parting;
And in the red pollution of its shame
His own sword, no more stark than they.

SEVERAL.

His head
From his body?

OTHERS.

Slain? By his own sword, slain?

FIRST ASSYRIAN.

Follow me
Within that our distraction come to rest
On certainty.

[*Exeunt Assyrians, except BAGOAS,
into tent.*]

FIRST PERSIAN

(to MEDE).

Fortune, thou art a woman!

Last night she sealed the last slim crack offering
A faint ray of escape, to-day she swings
A portal wide to let our forces pass
In leisured ranks.

FIRST MEDE.

Let us be ready. Who,
Think you, will take command?

FIRST PERSIAN.

He's coming there,
On even withered shoulders balancing
Two mountains, one of might, one of dis-
may. . . .

FIRST MEDE.

Yet unaware of both!

[*Enter in haste* BELTESHAZZAR.

BELTESHAZZAR.

Up, Holofernes!
Assyrians, allies, up! The mountains now

Are wrenched apart and from each yawning
crack

Rush torrents of armed men; the very earth
Spews from a thousand mouths loud springs of
steel.

The plains are swallowed in a thunderous flood,
Upon the bloody smother of its front
Tossing the wreckage of our might. Up, up!
Holofernes! Holofernes!

BAGOAS.

Alas! Thou great heart,
May this empire upborne by thee, fall shattered
In fitting ruin to attend thee!

BELTESHAZZAR.

Speak
What is the matter, ere thy feeble heart
To water turn with private sorrow!

BAGOAS.

Cursed
The ground so rotten such a rooted pillar
Could be cast down by such a hand!

FIRST PERSIAN

(to BAGOAS).

My friend,

The stoutest props are first to be engulfed
When by disruption's moles a mighty house
Is undermined.

BELTESHAZZAR

(drawing, to BAGOAS).

Speak now, or I will dig

Thy news straight from thy bosom!

BAGOAS.

Would thou couldst strike

A deadlier than the wound I bear. Slain, there,
By thrice-cursed treason lies Great Holofernes.

BELTESHAZZAR.

Slain? Holofernes? . . . Alas, Assyria!
Thy staff is broken and thou art low, indeed.
Who did this deed the blushing fiends of hell
Will envy him?

BAGOAS.

That viper from those hills
He in his pitying bosom warmed.

BELTESHAZZAR

The woman,
 My ally? . . . Frown, Fate! Scowl thy
 blackest! Man
 Has pride to bear thy wrath. But not that grin,
 That horrid, drawn, life-mocking grin! . . .
 Ha! ha! ha! ha!

(*To BAGOAS.*)

Follow!

[*Exeunt* BELTESHAZZAR *and*
 BAGOAS, *into tent.*]

FIRST MEDE.

A single staff of outward strength
 Splintering at last pierces the nerveless hand
 That leans too heavily upon 't.

FIRST PERSIAN.

Too strong
 A bull makes a meek herd!

FIRST MEDE.

A woman's craft
 Pierced true where every honest foeman's sword
 Glanced!

FIRST PERSIAN.

Armor too close-knit for clumsy sword
Gaps wide for subtler weapon.

[*Bugles. Alarms.*

FIRST MEDE.

Our foe-friends
Are near. The way to Media is long.

FIRST PERSIAN.

But speedy is the willing road.

FIRST MEDE.

Will you
Join me?

FIRST PERSIAN.

Not yet. I'll ask our new commander
Who saw that fateful woman last alone
Before she—made him chief.

FIRST MEDE.

Pray, come. Risk not
Fortune's last loaf thine enemy to bait.

FIRST PERSIAN.

Farewell.

[*Exit* FIRST MEDE.

[*Reënter* BELTESHAZZAR, BAGOAS,
and others from the tent.

BELTESHAZZAR.

Alas! Disruption now has raised
A hundred internecine arms!

[*Enter, in haste, an officer.*

OFFICER.

(*calling*).

The chief!

I must to the chief!

BELTESHAZZAR.

I am the chief! Report
To me, alone.

[*Takes him aside.*

FIRST ASSYRIAN.

The chief!

FIRST PERSIAN.

Who saw the woman
Last ere she chiefed him?

[*Commotion among the officers.*]

FIRST ASSYRIAN.

How got she away
Through tenfold guarded lines?

[*Commotion.*]

FIRST PERSIAN.

I heard it said
The Great King's will must suffer no refraction
By too compact a medium!

FIRST ASSYRIAN

(*with a glance toward BELTESHAZZAR*).

Beware! . . .

FIRST PERSIAN.

Lest we, too, obstruct him!

FIRST ASSYRIAN.

Comrades, let our tongues

Yield prompt obedience that our bruised hearts
Occasion win for further council.

[*To BELTESHAZZAR, who, having
dismissed the officer, returns.*

We wait

Your orders.

[*Bugles, sound of battle approaching.*

BELTESHAZZAR.

To your forces! Allies all
To center! Asshur's sons, to flanks.
[*Fugitive soldiers crossing the
stage.*

FUGITIVES.

They're on us.

Fly!

BELTESHAZZAR.

Stay, friends!

[*Drawing; to officers.*

Officers, show them, death 's more instant
I' the rear.

[*Striking down a fugitive.*

Thou 'st run thy farthest.

[*Enter more fugitives.*

FUGITIVES.

Flee! Slay him

That blocks us.

[They carry all the officers with them.]

BAGOAS

(at the tent).

Let mad ruin now be king!

My place is here until I follow him,

To bay dishonor.

[Exit BAGOAS into tent.]

[Enter ACHIOR leading Bethulian forces, in pursuit.]

ACHIOR

(to adjutant).

My brave Ammonites

Are standing like a wall?

ADJUTANT.

A steadfast rock

Frowning above the raving of the waters

Ringing his knees.

ACHIOR.

I have the charm will loose
Their rigor.

[*Sounding on his bugle an Am-
monite call. To adjutant.*

You, with flag of truce, interpret
That call further.

ADJUTANT.

I will.

[*Exit adjutant.*

ACHIOR

(*to his troops*).

Away, to add

An allied host.

[*Exeunt ACHIOR and his forces.*

[*Reënter BELTESHAZZAR and
FIRST PERSIAN, fighting.*

FIRST PERSIAN

(*strikes*).

Stand! That's for Persia's shame.

BELTESHAZZAR

(*parrying*).

Treason has dulled thy sword.

FIRST PERSIAN

(striking).

That for thy sneer,
Thou bloodless vampire!

BELTESHAZZAR.

My blade shrinks from thy blood;
'Tis foul with treachery.

FIRST PERSIAN.

Thine blenched away
When thou didst slay thy chief.

BELTESHAZZAR.

Thou hast said enough.

[Kills FIRST PERSIAN.]

A treasoned will tricks first his minister.

*[Bugles, sound of battle increasing.]**[Enter ASSYRIAN OFFICER.]*

ASSYRIAN OFFICER.

The center's pierced; allies o'erfan the plain
Like a great river that has burst a dyke.
The Medes have left the battle, homeward
fronted.
Ammon has joined the foe; our own, dispersed

As by a general explosion, hemmed,
Small islands, in a mounting flood of steel,
By very frenzy of blind valor haste
Their ruin. . . . Fly! The Ammonites!

[*Exit* ASSYRIAN OFFICER.

[*Enter Ammonites led by* ACHIOR
who attacks BELTESHAZZAR.

ACHIOR.

Leave him
To me. Thou, the prime source, the inmost
core,
Distilling forth the tinct of tyranny
That turns the fearless speech of loyal honor
Into a servile fervor of assent,
The warm, illumined gaze of willing faith
Into the haunted stare of fear, congeals
The springs of friendship trust and candid
ardor
In Gorgon rigor of despair: I'll print
On thee the seal Time's very self cannot
Undo.

[*Exeunt* ACHIOR and BELTESHAZZAR, *fighting*.

[*Enter* OZIAS, CHABRIS, CHARMIS,
with Bethulians.

CHARMIS

Victory!

BETHULIANS

(shouting).

Victory! Jehovah! Jehovah!

CHABRIS.

The Lord has breathed on them, they are dispersed.

The Lord has spoken, where is now their pride!

FOLLOWERS OF CHABRIS.

His word! It was His word!

OZIAS.

Brothers, remain!

Let younger feet vie in pursuit. Behold!

[Pointing to the tent.]

Iniquity raised up a mighty seat,

But His wrath thrust him down. Abomination

Has left a dwelling for His word. Guard it

That she that bore the sword may enter first

To consecrate it to His service. Listen! . . .

A song of praise. Look! Branches in their
hands

Our women go before her in a dance.
Rosy arms, garlands of olive, waving tresses,
Lithe legs, the grace of swaying bodies,
Gay fluttering robes: In rhythmic tumult rapt
They come on eager twinkling feet. . . .

*[A song of women is heard in the
distance, approaching.]*

'Tis she,

Judith, the Chosen. . . .

CHARMIS.

Where?

OZIAS.

But why is she

Without a branch, or garland, or some gay
Token of gladness?

CHABRIS.

Why with heavy feet
Lags she behind the tripping?

CHARMIS.

Look, a maiden
Wreathing her head with olive.

OZIAS.

She heeds it not.

CHARMIS.

It slips.

OZIAS.

The dust has it.

CHABRIS.

Her God rejoices,

And she is sad!

CHANT OF WOMEN

(within).

Our young men's swords broke on his iron sides,
Nor old men's wiles could stand before his eyes,

*[Enter singers, continuing their
chant.]*

Nor treason tripped the feet of his ambition:
For great was he beyond the deeds of men.

Hail, Daughter of Juda!

ALL.

Hail, Daughter of Juda!

*[Enter more women with garlands
of olive. A chant and dance.]*

WOMEN.

His footmen were a cloud upon the mountains,
But God the mountains moved from their
foundations;

His numbers stopped the rivers of the plain,
But God has rent it as a cloth defiled.

Hail, Daughter of Juda!

His horsemen were a tempest and a hail,
But God was the great wind that swallowed
them;

The Almighty Lord arose and broke his battle,
Yea, by the hand of woman laid him low.

Hail, Daughter of Juda!

A woman made him weak with his desire,
Yea, with the beauty of her countenance.
Her sandal ravishèd his eye. Jehovah,
Thy daughter's voice made his soul prisoner.

Hail, Daughter of Juda!

[*Enter JUDITH, unadorned, absorbed, followed by a crowd of people.*]

Of his desire she made a scimitar
An ambush of her linen garment's hem:

Yea, in the flaming ardor of his wooing
She shaped the sword of Great Jehovah's word.
Hail, Daughter of Juda!

THE PEOPLE.

Hail, Daughter of Juda!

OZIAS.

Blessed art thou, daughter!

CHABRIS.

Thou exaltation of Jerusalem!

CHARMIS.

Thou art the great rejoicing of thy race!

OZIAS.

Thou, the great glory of Israel.

OTHERS.

Hail Judith!

CHARMIS.

Behold thy people safe, thine enemy
Undone!

CHABRIS.

Thou hast pleased thy Lord for evermore!

THE PEOPLE.

Judith! Thou 'rt life!

[They crowd around her.]

JUDITH

(slowly looking up; then with a sudden cry).

Away! . . . I am to you
Pollution and foul death!

PEOPLE

(shrinking away).

What says she: death?

CHABRIS.

The Lord will purify.

CHARMIS.

Thy people's love
Will justify.

JUDITH.

God of my Fathers, hear me!
'Tis done; entirely done. I see it now

Sink festering through the fair front of the past.
This hand that did the deed is foul; this eye
That 'held it pours decay upon their brows
Gnawing the golden radiance of their joy;
This heart that fed it, lays upon their will
The palsy of corruption. Hear me now,
My God! I did Thy will to the uttermost.
This is the wage I ask: Swiftly I struck him,
So now, before them, lest the pestilent
Contagion of this deed steal over them
Upon the wanton bypaths of their pride,
Strike me; here; 'tis Thy child that did Thy
bidding
Utterly. . . . (pause).

[*Awed murmur among the people.*]

CHARMIS.

Up! Rejoice! Thy deed shall be
A beacon to thy race while youth seeks maid,
And women bear us children!

JUDITH

(*continuing*).

If my womb

Bear him a son——

[*A movement among the people.*]

Shall I speak to him thus:
“ While with the mighty joy of fathering thee
His great heart beat on mine, from his life giving
I snatched the seed of murder; when all my
being
Flamed with his vital fire, I could not soften,
Though melt the temper of the venom'd asp,
And tigress fury; while I stole thy life
I paid him foulest death . . . ” ?

CHABRIS.

Thy God has laid
This deed on thee; He will pollution take
From thy womb also.

JUDITH

(continuing).

If I bear a daughter
Shall I say: “ With a harlot’s craft I got thee,
Fouling the holiest of love! His cleanness
Was swallowed in the vilest mire of treason,
Whence thou hast being. Thou, too, shalt find
a Great one
Whom thy soul grapples as with hooks of steel,
And thou, too, shalt a foul assassin see

Rising from out a black devilish pit,
In thee——" ? Ah! Monstrous horror!
Away! . . .

[Pause. She becomes more composed.]

CHABRIS.

Have faith!
Thy God will lift this shame from thee.
Through thee
His enemy He slew. Would He renew him
In thee?

JUDITH.

And if my womb remain unblessed
My heart in desolation will cry out
'Gainst each Judean wife that be with child,
Raising a clamor to Thy very seat
On high, upraiding Thee!
[A movement among the people.]

CHABRIS.

Beware! Lest thou
Blaspheme the Almighty Lord, our God!

JUDITH

(continuing).

Slaying him

That was my life I slew myself. And as
Thy word was in my hand a blade of death
So be it in Thine. For look, Thy chosen blood
In me is mingled with Thine enemy's.

CHABRIS

(awed).

No further! Stay! Thy speech is death!
That is
His word.

THE PEOPLE

(horrified).

His word! His word!

JUDITH

(continuing).

God of my Fathers!

Thou canst not part the marriage of our blood.
And if Thou didst reach forth Thy might
against him,
I'd shield him, saying: I'd rather brave, with
him,

Torments and desolation of Thy wrath
Than be Thy cherished child without him. . . .

'Tis

Thy word. . . . Now strike that I, a tardy
bride,

May join the husband of my soul!

PEOPLE

(*aghast*).

Husband!

CHABRIS.

Almighty Lord, heed not her blasphemy!

PEOPLE.

She has blasphemed the Lord! He will destroy
us!

CHABRIS.

Purify thee lest thou bring greater evil
Upon thy people.

CHARMIS.

She has slain the wolf
That she deliver us to the lion. She

Has saved us from the Wrath that she may give
us

Unto the Fury!

*[Growing murmurs among the
people.]*

OZIAS.

Peace! What she has done
For us is past our judging. Let this be
Between her and her Lord alone.

CHABRIS.

She must
Atonement make.

THE PEOPLE.

Atonement! Atonement!

CHABRIS.

Daughter, abase thyself before the Lord
Lest with His curse He smite us.

CHARMIS

(approaching closely).

Heed thy people!
They bid thee take away the curse that thou
Hast brought upon them.

THE PEOPLE

(surrounding her, clamoring angrily).

Take away the curse!

JUDITH

*(straightening to her full height, looking fixedly
into the distance as if she beheld a vision.
The people fall back. Pause. Then).*

Thy word? Was that Thy word that battered
down

The gentle opposition of my soul
With iron front of wrath? And this that comes
With tender tones and love-enfranchised looks,
Yet with a brow more sovereign, to possess
My soul of the one boon it craveth,—this
Be blasphemy? Is Thy strength always one,
Sole versed in the sheer ruin of Thy blows,
Or the sheer blessing of Thine utter grace,
Forever spurning the twice-heartened hazard
Of man's dearest desire leagued with Thy
choice? . . .

CHABRIS

(awed).

She challenges the Lord!

THE PEOPLE

(awed).

She doubts our God.

JUDITH.

Dost thou walk in the storm and in the silence
After the storm, the same, a warrior
I' the mantle of Thy might? Art thou the same,
Shining amid the palaced pride o' the Great
And on the doorstep of the humble, foiling
And fostering both? In councils of the wise,
I' the chatter of the market places, yea,
In chiseled, ancient phrases of Thy priests,
Is Thy will single as the golden sun
Kindling the mists of dawn, or wrapped in mirk,
Or garbless in the vacant blue? Thy gaze
Unchanged in melting ardors of true love,
And the cold rigor of fell hate? Thy presence
In the utter depths of the heart, and in the
 shallows,
Unaltered? . . . Heark! . . . God, is this
 voice that swells,
Muting the tumult of my brothers' pride,
Mounting above that earlier word that silenced
My heart and every prayer of human kindness
In me: Is this Thy word also?

CHABRIS

(horrified).

The Lord

Has stricken her with madness.

CHARMIS

(to THE PEOPLE).

Pray the Lord

That on the guilty one alone He visit

Her sin!

THE PEOPLE.

Save us! She is the guilty one,

O Lord!

JUDITH

(rapt).

God, O my God, I see Thee, yea,
Thy daughter stands within Thy Presence.

Aye,

Thou 'rt in all these, Thou, even Thou, a soul
Forever striving, ever seeking birth

In fated ventures. The word of wrath was
thine,

Thine now the word that weds me to my Great
one,

And Thine the words of loyalty and love
In his heroic soul!

CHABRIS.

Take her away!

She is an enemy of God.

THE PEOPLE.

Take her,

Take her!

[They approach her threateningly.]

OZIAS.

The curse of God on him that lifts
His hand against her.

JUDITH

(turning to them, transfigured).

Know ye Him, my brothers?
Know ye the God-hour of the soul? Know ye
The hour that looks on utter things and fails
not?
The hour that loses life to live?

CHABRIS.

Brothers,

A great offense has come upon our heads.

Let us take council how we turn aside
Jehovah's wrath.

THE PEOPLE.
Save us! Save!

CHABRIS.
We must make
An offering.

THE PEOPLE.
A sacrifice! . . . Blasphemer!
[THE PEOPLE *threaten* JUDITH.]

OZIAS.
Stay! You shall have a sacrifice. Enter
The tent of him that was our enemy.
Spoil it that we may take his countless treasures
Unto the tabernacle of the Lord
And consecrate them, in Jerusalem,
That God be pleased therewith.

CHABRIS.
Nor fail to take
His enemy that He be glorified
In the dishonor of His foe.

JUDITH
THE PEOPLE.

To the tent!

To the tent!

JUDITH
(*trying to bar them*).

Nay! I beseech you! I will do
As you demand. . . . Do not dishonor
him. . . .

'Tis I, your sister, saved you!

CHABRIS
(*to THE PEOPLE*).

To the tent!

JUDITH.
No! . . .

OZIAS.

Stay!
[*Several people have reached the
door of the tent. As they try
to open it, BAGOAS, with drawn
sword, rushes out.*

BAGOAS
(*charging JUDITH*).

Harlot! As thou didst unto him
So I . . .

JUDITH.

Strike true, Bagoas!

BAGOAS

(pierced by CHABRIS' sword, falls).

Ah! . . .

JUDITH

(throwing herself on him).

'Tis I!

Dost hear my voice? . . . Wilt be my guide
to him?

Stay but a little while. . . .

[Enter ACHIOR with Ammonites.

OZIAS

(to THE PEOPLE).

Go hence, my people.

On my head be the guilt if any guilt
Remain inexpiate. Have pity, pray,
Upon her sorrow now.

ACHIOR

(to THE PEOPLE).

Your brothers crave you.

Go heal the countenance of grim fatigue
With cheer of song and dance.

*[Ammonites move between JUDITH
and the mob.]*

WOMEN

'(chanting as they go).

Of his desire she made a scimitar
An ambush of her linen garment's hem. . . .

[Exeunt WOMEN chanting, followed by dancers and most of the people. Remain, Elders and a few of the people.]

JUDITH

(to BAGOAS).

Thou must hear me.

There is a spark of Holofernes' soul
In thy fidelity. . . .

BAGOAS.

Holofernes!

Thou, the most gallant, felled, a harlot's dupe,
Ere thine eye, steeped in trustful drowsiness,
Could look her treacherous blade to scorn.

JUDITH.

Listen!

Thou harborest fidelity greater
Than thine own life. I sought fidelity
Beyond the life I held more dear than
mine. . . .

BAGOAS.

Fidelity! Aye. That I know. But you,
Strumpet, that stole his life in sleep, would you
Now steal the strength of the sole bond 'twixt
him
And me?

JUDITH.

Nay! I would grasp thy garment's hem
To win to him.

BAGOAS

(pause).

Where is my sword? Prove it. . . .
I have not long to wait.

[Feeling for his sword.]

CHABRIS.

I'll draw thy fang,
Viper!
[Charging BAGOAS.]

JUDITH

(barring him).

Stay! He is mine.

OZIAS.

So be it!

JUDITH

(to BAGOAS).

Hark! . . .

Alas! I try to speak, but words turn traitors
Unto their native meanings. All my being
Rent through the middle, strives against itself.
A traitor must renounce his very soul's
Companionship. Such is the solitude
Of treason. . . .

[Listening for BAGOAS' breath.]

Stay for me!

BAGOAS.

Take me within.

I'll join him there.

JUDITH.

Is that his sword?

BAGOAS.

Not that.

I meant to seek thy blood, not mingle thine
With his!

JUDITH.

Is his within?

BAGOAS.

Thou 'lt know it! . . . Ah!
'Tis time. Lay me beside him.

CHABRIS

(trying to interfere, to OZIAS).

She would serve

The enemy of God!

ACHIOR.

She served her God
Utterly! What have you done that you dare
Question her?

OZIAS.

Spare her!

[They withdraw toward left side.]

JUDITH

(supporting BAGOAS to the tent).

Thou, his friend, shalt guard
His sword arm in eternity . . . and I,
His wife, shall keep the side his heart's on. Ah!
I see thee beckoning at the gate, beloved.
Thou 'rt waiting for the proof.—Bagoas, haste,
Lest he impatient grow. He's been alone
Too long. Alone! I, too, have been alone—
Alone in what fell solitude when most
I seemed with him! But now I come, husband,
To meet thee with a brow as clear as ever
A true wife's. Aye, my soul is now so even
No slightest shadow of deceit could hide,
Nor alienation of restraint, within
Some fold of least duplicity. Thou wilt
Know. Thou wilt know. . . .

*[Exeunt JUDITH and BAGOAS into
tent.]*

CHABRIS.

Let us now call a meeting
Of all our people that she purify
Herself lest she bring death upon us.

OZIAS.

Nay,
That we question our pride within His sight
That He make straight our way before us.

CHABRIS.

Guilt
Is guilt, however great the deed.

*[Sounds of the song are heard in
the distance; slowly approach-
ing.]*

OZIAS.

A deed
So great bursts every measure but the scope
Of love and gratitude.

CHABRIS.

Thy sympathy
Is not toward the Most High but toward base-
ness
That is destruction!

JUDITH

(within).

Stay for me, Bagoas! . . .

Ah! . . . I behold thee, lover of my soul. . . .
 So strong . . . so safe . . . so sweet. . . .

CHABRIS	} (<i>Almost</i> <i>simulta-</i> <i>neously</i>)	{	Did you hear? . . . God!
OZIAS			God! Have mercy!
ACHIOR			Ah! She was true!

[*Exeunt* OZIAS and CHABRIS, *into*
tent. ACHIOR *remains.*

ACHIOR

(*musiug*).

Aye! She was true. She held, within her sub-
 stance,
 The utter test of action.

VOICES OF SINGERS

(*without*).

Blessed art thou within the sight of God
 And blessed He that made thee do this deed!
 Thy hope shall not depart while men remember
 The strength of God that did avenge our fall.

Hail, Daughter of Juda!

[*Reënter* OZIAS and CHABRIS.

CHABRIS.

God! Thy hand
Is heavy on Thy children!

OZIAS

(in great sorrow, praying).

God! My God!
Have mercy on her that has saved Thy
people! . . .
The vessel of Thy word is broken, gone
The witness of Thy will unto Thy race.
God of our Fathers, Thou hast set Thy children
A heavy labor. Didst Thou save our bodies
That our souls perish? Better 't were to lose
Our lives with her in purity than that
Our souls in the corruption of our pride
Be slain.

SINGERS

(without).

A woman made him weak with his desire,
Yea, with the beauty of her countenance. . . .
*[Sounds continue, gradually diminishing, as of people marching
past at some distance.]*

CHABRIS

(horrificed).

Stay them! 'Tis blasphemy and lewdness
Now!

'ACHIOR.

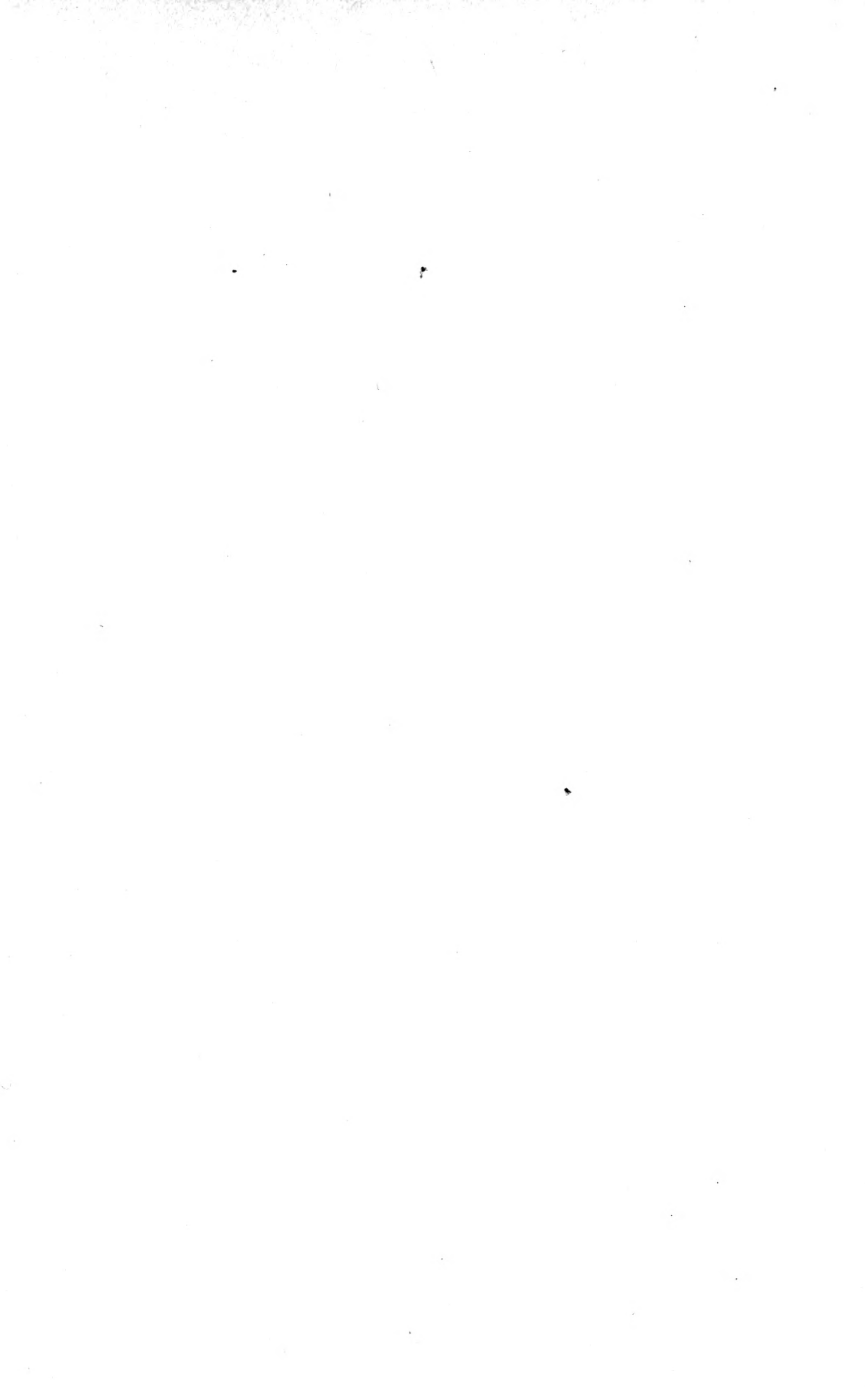
A calamity like this that racks
The fitness of the Ages' fashioning,
Makes but a little thing of private guilt
Atop of it.

OZIAS

(rousing himself).

A deed has been enacted
Which, having sprung from the utmost heart of
man
Endures unto the last, an awful brow
Bending on every Age it serves, asking
A full and separate account. Up, brothers,
To our task, lest we default.

(CURTAIN)



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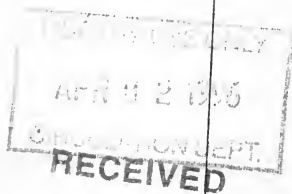
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